

Quilts & Coverlets • Matthew Edel & Blacksmithing • Auto Trip in 1905 • Feed Sack Quilts

SPRING/SUMMER 1999 • \$6

# Iowa Heritage

ILLUSTRATED





# Front Porch

Dear Readers:

We editors believe all our authors are winners. But once a year, the Board of Trustees of the State Historical Society of Iowa appoints a committee representing historians and the public (but not including the editor) to tackle the daunting task of choosing what they consider the best article in that year's *Iowa Heritage Illustrated*. Recently, the 1998 Throne/Aldrich Award (named after two longtime editors at the State Historical Society) was presented to Becky Wilson Hawbaker for her article "'No Middle Ground': Change and Controversy at Glenwood State School" (Summer 1998 issue). Honorable Mentions go to Chris Rasmussen for "'Mr. Stong's Dreamy Iowa'" (Winter 1998), and Edward R. Tryon for "'Aboard the Ill-Fated Ship': Iowa's Connections to the Titanic" (Summer 1998). Congratulations to these authors! Readers who missed their articles can order back issues at 319-335-3916.

While researching quilts for this issue, we discovered this clever bit of poetry in the Des Moines *Capital* (September 6, 1914), along with a story about Iowa women reusing the cloth in Occident flour sacks:

*When Mary and Willie and Max,  
Had little to cover their backs.  
Waists, caps, middies and skirts,  
Neat trousers and shirts,  
Were made from the Occident sacks.*

*Kiddies grew up and thrived every hour,  
In beauty and health and in power.  
When requested to state,  
What made them so great,  
They answered, 'twas Occident Flour.*

*The "dough" now not one of them lacks,  
They pay on their incomes, a tax,  
Beneficial to health  
And conducive to wealth  
Is the Occident Flour and the sacks.*

This issue also looks at the changes wrought by the Automobile Age on the

traditional blacksmith shop. Kenneth Dunshee describes those changes evocatively in *The Village Blacksmith* (1957): "The most recalcitrant or vicious horse, mules or oxen that ever had to be hobbled or slung up for shoeing never gave the village blacksmith any serious trouble compared to that mystifying, noisy, greasy 'critter,' the automobile. The birth of the horseless buggy was the birth of the blues for the smith. The miracle and phenomena of Henry Ford's inventive genius produced such an endless flow of especially tooled and precision-made machines that the village mechanic couldn't keep up. He tried. The sign 'garage man' appeared over the old horseshoers' door. Publications such as *The American Blacksmith*, *The American Ironsmith* and others, made an all-out effort to help the smith too, but it was a losing battle from the start."

Let us know what you remember about that transition.

Thanks to those of you who have already responded to our "If Iowans Made Movies About Iowa" survey in the last issue. We plan to publish the responses in a future issue. Meanwhile there's still time to send in yours. Please do.

We took a delightful phone call from a reader in response to the article about Elizabeth Irish's University Business School in the last issue. Bill Hageboeck of Iowa City told us that he was one of Irish's students in 1925 or 1926. Then a journalism student at the State University of Iowa, he decided he had better learn how to type, so he enrolled in a three-month typing course at Irish's business school in Iowa City. What does he remember about Irish's school? First off, he was the only male in a class of 31. "There was no monkey business," he told us. "She was all business." He described Irish as "quite a character" and "an excellent teacher." Hageboeck went on to a long career in newspapers, working at the university's *Daily Iowan*, the *Des Moines Register*, and the *Iowa City Press-Citizen*, where he was publisher

for 22 years. Looks like Elizabeth Irish's typing class paid off.

We also heard from another longtime reader (and writer—he's written for us about hired men and shivarees). His letter follows, in response to the photo essay on snow (Fall 1998). —The Editor

## Wintertime radio

The blizzards of 1936 found Iowa quite dependent on commercial radio. On our Woodbury County farm we listened to the radio for markets, weather, and entertainment. How well I recall sitting around the Atwater Kent with my family that February to hear about snow-bound communities and other crises. We listened to radio station WHO and Des Moines newscaster H. R. Gross, later the curmudgeon congressman, as he announced more small towns which were out of coal—perhaps food. His somber voice gave an added sense of dread. Not that we were suffering on the farm; we had plenty of food, coal, and cottonwood chunks.

But bootleg radio was a morale builder that winter. Our neighbor's sons, Darrel and Earl, were radio buffs, and they broadcast low-power radio right on the AM frequency band. We heard local gossip and juvenile humor. At least one hired man was a target for zingers, and he found their kidding hard to take. The grownups were generally entertained, and we kids were awed by the magic of airwaves. In my family we still discuss the Winter of 1936, and very local radio is always mentioned.

Gordon Marshall  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

## Come and converse on our front porch!

Share your thoughts with other readers here on the Front Porch page. Send your letters to Ginalie Swaim, editor, *Iowa Heritage Illustrated*, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52240-1806. Or by e-mail at: gswaim@blue.weeg.uiowa.edu. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

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In 1920, the State Historical Society of Iowa founded one of the nation's first popular history magazines—*The Palimpsest*. The magazine was renamed *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* in 1996, the year of Iowa's 150th anniversary of statehood.

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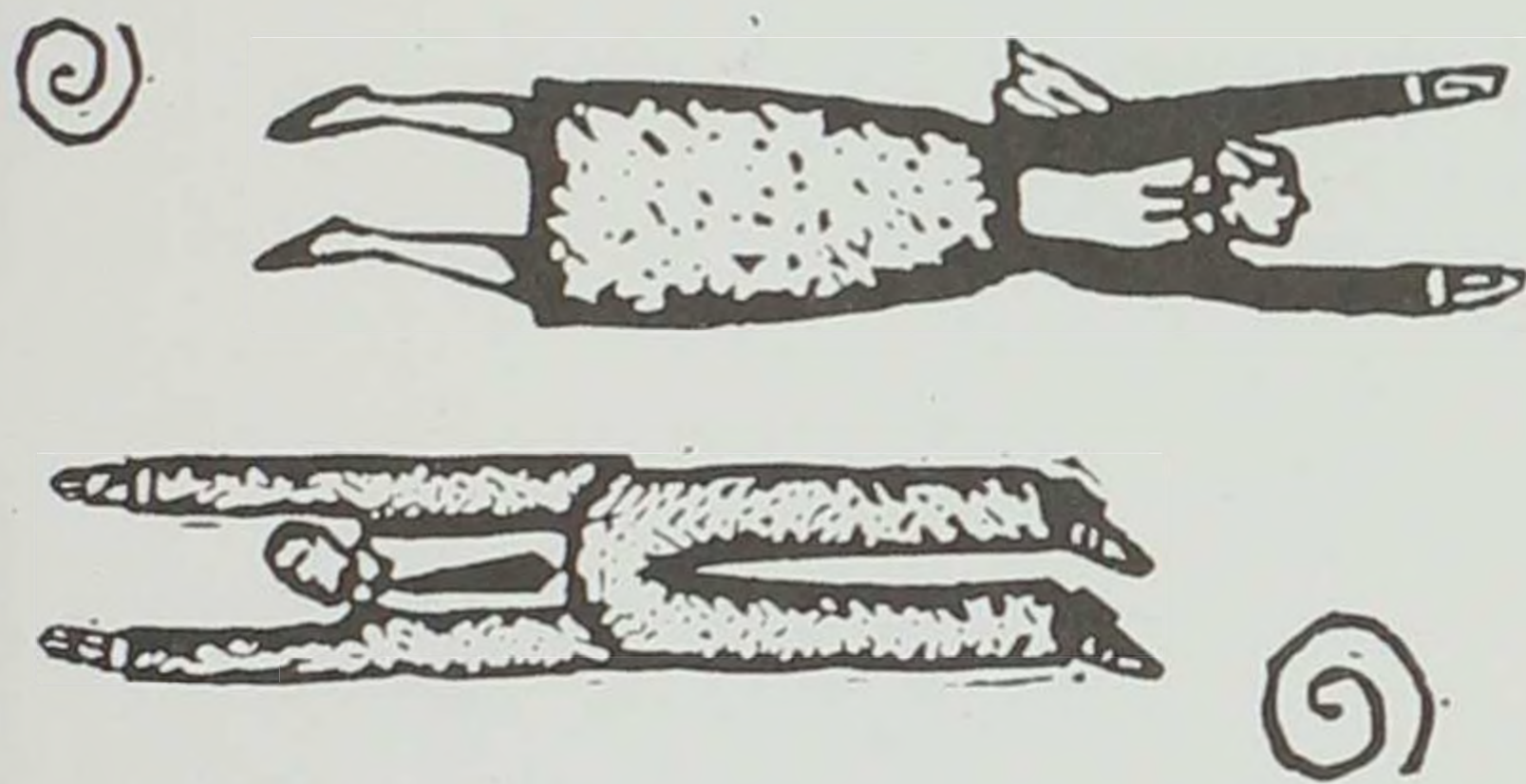


Let your imagination soar  
on a voyage to Iowa's past . . .

# Heritage

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\* off the single-copy price



# Iowa Heritage

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Formerly The Palimpsest

Spring/Summer 1999, Vol. 80, Nos. 1 & 2

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## On the Cover

Women gathered in a Lutheran church parlor in North Liberty, Iowa, pause in their quilting and face the photographer (date unknown). Quilting in Iowa has long been an expression of both the individual and the community. In this issue—a close-up look at quilts and coverlets, and the stories behind them.



SHSI (IOWA CITY)



Sharpening plowshares, repairing wagons, and shoeing horses kept blacksmiths busy. Left: a blacksmith shop in Dubuque, Iowa.



## Blacksmithing & Quilting

Blacksmithing and quilting—two very different worlds, it would seem. Consider the elements of one—hammers and tongs, heavy and inert iron, sharpening and pounding. A dark, smoky, dusty domain for wagons and horses. Men's work.

Consider the other—needles and thread, soft and colorful cottons, smoothing and stitching. A corner of the house with good light, kept clean for the quilting frame. Women's work.

This issue of *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* presents a vivid look at these two quite different worlds and their practitioners. What we eventually have come to recog-

nize, however, is their common ground.

Both blacksmiths and quilters are resourceful, often fashioning something useful out of scraps, be they metal or cloth, saved from other tasks.

Both work with materials that "give." Blacksmiths heat iron until it is bendable and malleable. Quilters add dimension with batting, gently stretch the bias, take a discreet tuck.

Both usually begin with the utilitarian but often cross over into the aesthetic. Both are creative. Blacksmiths invent tools and redesign standard objects like gates and hinges. Quilters create new



patterns, or transform traditional ones, to express personal taste and meaning.

Both engage in precise geometry. Quilters painstakingly align stars and hexagons, turn sharp corners in cloth, create ropes, plumes, and fields of diamonds out of tiny, even, endless stitches. Blacksmiths master iron and oak, turning circles and spokes into indestructible, load-hungry wagon wheels.

Both were once essential players. Blacksmiths kept our tools sharp, our wagons rolling, our horses from going lame. Quilters kept our bodies warm despite brutal Iowa winters, our spirits comforted amidst epidemic and injury, our babies tucked in and safe.

In essence, both blacksmithing and quilting once held the power of the everyday. Although both are

still practiced today as art forms, they resonate with the past.

This issue of *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* explores and celebrates these two worlds, or spheres, that once were a part of daily life and livelihood in Iowa.

First, we take you to Matthew Edel's blacksmith shop in Haverhill. Edel was such an experienced, respected, and long-lived blacksmith that his customers even included other blacksmiths!

Next, we send you on a 1905 summer automobile trip from Des Moines to Spirit Lake—with frequent breakdowns, frequent swearing, and frequent repairs at a blacksmith shop.

Then we invite you into the home of Mildred Ross, a Burlington quilter who for 60 years has turned feed sacks and dress scraps into useful, meaningful quilts.

Finally we dazzle you with an astounding collection of quilts, coverlets, counterpanes, and comforters, in cottons, wools, and velvets.

A single issue wasn't nearly big enough for all these wonderful stories and pictures. So we combined the spring and summer issues into one double issue—and still it's filled to the brim!

Oh, and there's something else this issue celebrates—our 80th year as Iowa's history magazine. (Our first 76 years, as many of you will remember, were under the intriguing title *The Palimpsest*.)

Let's see, silver is for 25 years, gold for 50, diamond for 75. For 80 years, given this special issue on blacksmithing and quilting, how about . . . iron and cotton?

Please, no gifts! Instead, we present this issue to *you*, our loyal readers.  
—The Editor



Women often worked together to quilt the quilt tops they had made individually. Right: Jesse White Anderson (standing, in plaid dress) hosts a quilting bee in January 1951 at her home near North Liberty, Iowa.



SHSI (IOWA CITY)





**M**atthew Edel is flanked by his son Louis and a local farmer, John Stalzer (on right), in this early 1930s photo of Edel's blacksmith shop in Haverhill, Iowa. In the front half of the shop, Edel did general forging and horseshoeing. General wood-working, wagon work, and manufacturing of tools were done in the rear half. A space under the stairway was used for plow grinding, and the half-story attic was used for storing wagon parts and other inventory. Of Edel's eight children, Louis was most involved in his father's shop.



# Matthew Edel and his Blacksmith Shop

## Artisan and Inventor in Haverhill, Iowa

**E**choing up and down the dirt streets of Haverhill, Iowa, the staccato sound of hammer on anvil told the townspeople that Matthew Edel was at work.

For half a century, Edel was the blacksmith for Haverhill (a small German-Catholic town in Marshall County) and the surrounding farms. He sharpened sickles and shovels, mended hinges and chains, repaired wagons and plowshares, shod horses and oxen. He worked in both wood and metal, over hot forges and around skittish horses. A skilled artisan, Edel was also an inventor, creating and marketing at least a half-dozen tools.

Artisans like Matthew Edel were not unique in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Most of America relied on blacksmiths like Edel to manufacture and repair items of everyday use. Nearly every town had at least one blacksmith. In 1895, Iowa had more blacksmiths than it had doctors or clergy, barbers or butchers. In Marshall County alone, there were 89 blacksmiths. Perhaps what was special about Matthew Edel, however, was his ability to adapt to changing times, thereby keeping his business viable into the mid-20th century.

Born in 1856 in Stuttgart, Germany, Matthew Edel immigrated to the United States with his family when he was a teenager.

Edel and his family lived in central Illinois for about a decade before moving to the Iowa City area. There Edel met Maria Hofman. They married in 1883.

That February, when Edel was 26, he traveled to the newly platted town of Haverhill (about five miles southwest of Marshalltown) and purchased three lots. One lot already had a 30'x50' wood frame building on it. This would be the blacksmith shop and living quarters.

In April 1883, Matthew and Maria moved to Haverhill. Over the next several years, they began to raise a family (eventually

**Matthew and Maria Edel's wedding portrait, taken in Iowa City in 1883.**

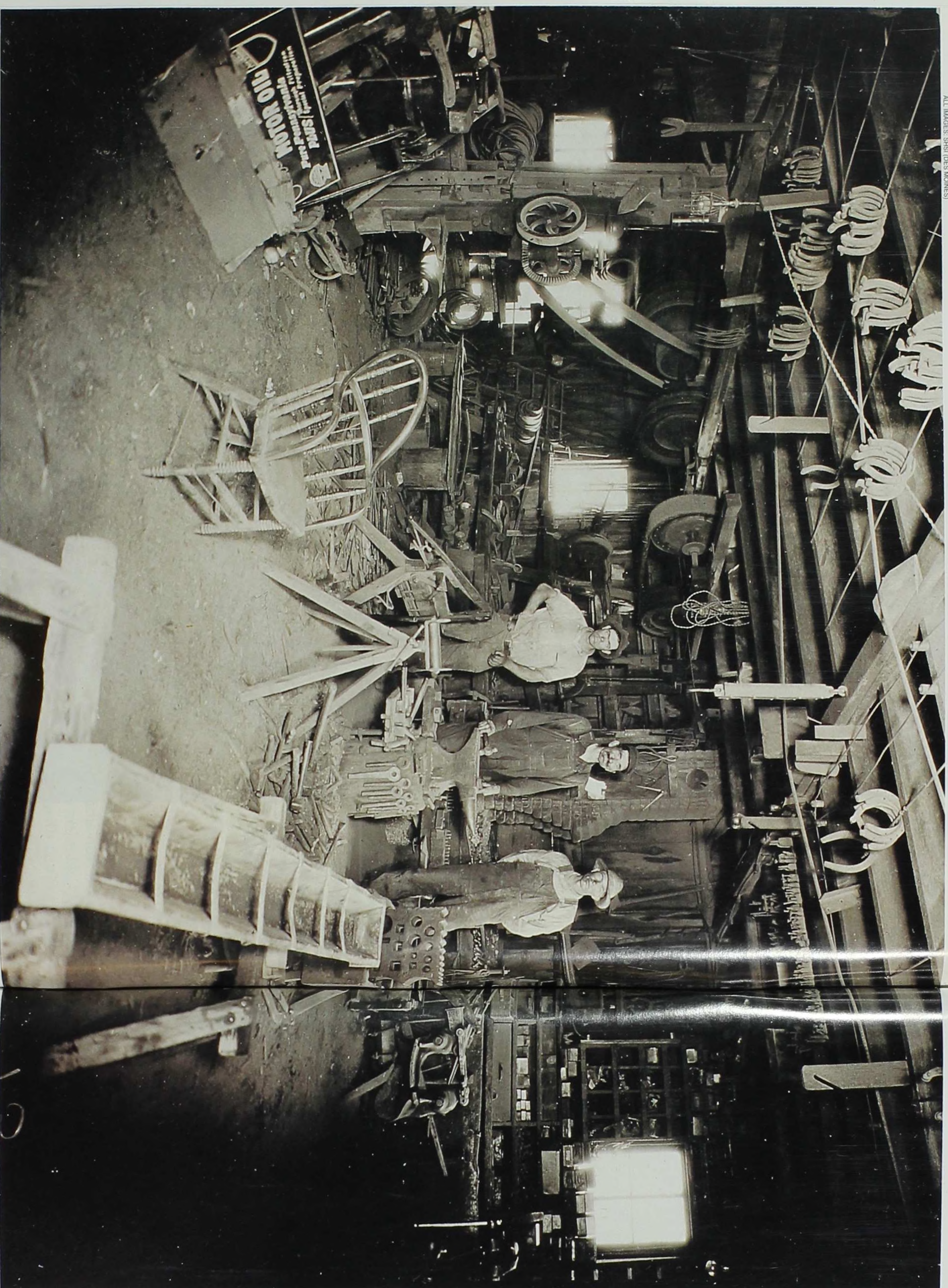


SHSI (DES MOINES); COURTESY EVELYN BLUM

**text by  
Michael W. Vogt**

**photos by  
Chuck Greiner**





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SHS (JES MONES); COURTESY EVELYN BLUM



eight children) in the tiny, dark, half-story living quarters above Matthew's blacksmith shop. Not until the early 1890s did they build a separate home, a nine-room, two-story, wood frame house just beyond his shop.

Edel's blacksmith shop would soon be among a handful of new businesses in the thriving village, including a lumber yard, implement dealer, railroad depot, grain elevator, saloon, and general store.

As Edel set up his workspace—including a leather bellows and a coal-fired forge for iron work—he probably had no idea that his shop would outlast him. After he died in 1940, the blacksmith shop was seldom used and essentially left unchanged until the 1980s, when the Edel family undertook steps to protect and preserve it. In

**L**ittle has changed in Matthew Edel's blacksmith shop in the half-century since he died. Its layout and arrangement are essentially the same (compare photo at right to previous page). In front of the forge, rows of letter and number punches are ready for stamping. Left of the forge, a built-in drawer with a secret latch stored tobacco and other comforts. Various sized bolt headers and anvil tools are clustered around the anvil stump. The large hoop (far right) is an iron tire for a wagon wheel, set in a device called a tire shrinker. Below: Matthew and Maria Edel (holding Joseph) pose outside their small structure that eventually doubled in size.







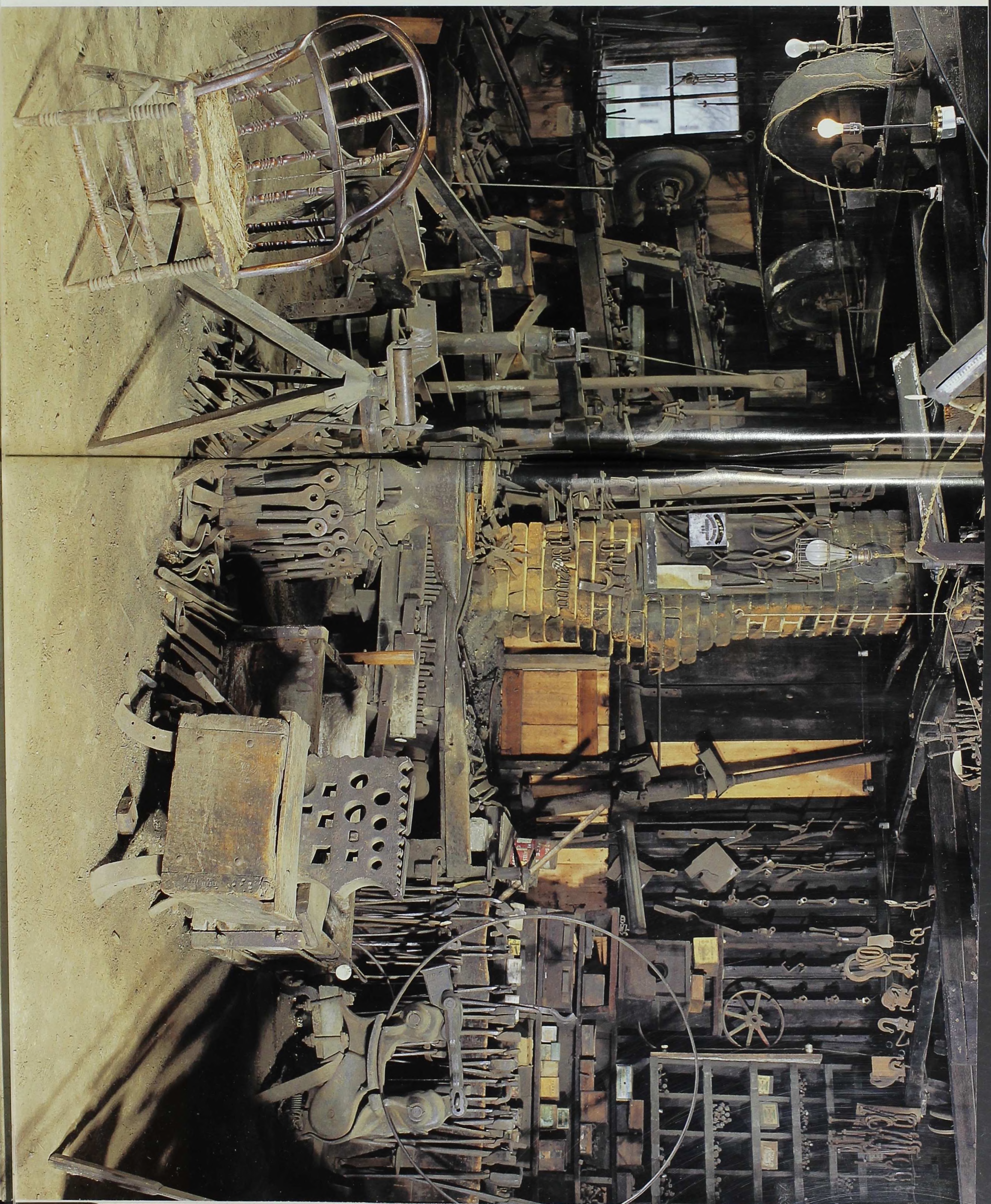


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**E**del's rack for horseshoes still stores the variety of shoes a blacksmith or farrier would have on hand. Each shoe was custom made to fit each hoof of each draft animal and to serve different uses and situations—from keg shoes for traction of draft horses (bottom left), to bar shoes to protect a split hoof or correct an orthopedic defect (center column, second from bottom), to smaller shoes for ponies (right column, two down) and mules (right column, four down). To the far left of the shoes, Edel hung a supply of handmade clevises with handmade bolts, for use on doubletrees and singletrees.

1983 it was listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and in 1986 the family, led by Edel's granddaughter Laura Murphy, donated it to the State of Iowa. The State Historical Society of Iowa preserves it as one of the state's historic sites.

To walk through Edel's shop today is to enter the atmosphere of a blacksmith shop a century ago—when the nation was largely powered and transported by horses, not automobiles; when everyday items were routinely repaired, not replaced; and when blacksmithing was an essential community service, not a vanishing skill. In this space, our imaginations quickly conjure up the clang of hammer against horse-shoe, the zing of saw into oak, and the smell of white-hot iron over fire.

Like all blacksmiths, Matthew Edel spent a significant amount of his time working as a farrier—making, repairing, and mounting horseshoes. The horse was the primary source of transportation and agricultural power throughout the country. Horses were essential to America, and so farriers were essential to horses. Horseshoes protected a horse's hooves from hard roadways, from slipping on ice and snow, and from rotting in wet weather, which would have caused the horse to go lame.

As Edel's business grew (he sometimes shod as many as 40 horses in one day), he built an addition to the south with a special area for his farrier work. In another part of the shop, he repaired carriages and wagons.

Farmers also relied on blacksmiths like Edel to manufacture, repair, and sharpen agricultural machinery, implements, and tools. Edel certainly was not a novice to agricultural equipment design

You Always get there with  
Neverslip Calks.



**MATTHEW EDEL**  
*Blacksmithing and Repairing*  
Haverhill, Iowa.

To \_\_\_\_\_

From \_\_\_\_\_

**MATHEW EDEL**  
General Blacksmithing  
and  
**MAKER of SPECIALTIES**  
HAVERHILL IOWA.





**A** portion of the shop was used for wagon repair and general woodworking, with a wide variety of hand tools nearby—braces and bits, hand saws and draw knives, planes and spoke shaves, chisels and gouges. The band saw, built into the rafters and floor, was fashioned from two custom-made wooden wheels. It could be treadled for small jobs, or line-shaft driven.





and repair. In Illinois, he had designed and patented a wire grain binder. In Haverhill, he continued to invent tools, often fashioned from scrap materials around the shop. In 1895, for instance, he patented the "Perfection Dehorning Clipper" for dehorning cattle. In 1899 he invented a fence stretcher, and in 1901 he produced and marketed through mail order his "Perfection Wedge Cutter" for "wagon and carriage makers and repairers."

His advertising flyer for the wedge cutter is filled with glowing testimonials. A Massachusetts customer wrote: "Any blacksmith or wheelwright that does not purchase one of your wedge cutters... must be ready to retire from business, for a man cannot afford to do the work by hand when he can get a machine to do it for such a small price." A Washington, D.C., patent lawyer praised its "many superior features of novelty as well as simplicity and practicability," calling it "by far the best wedge cutter on the market." In nearby Marshalltown, Lennox Machine Company considered it the "neatest little machine in our factory."

He also invented and marketed "Edel's Nut Pliers," which did the work "of a small monkey wrench and five socket wrenches." With no advertising, Edel quickly sold 280 pairs of the nut pliers to farmers direct from his shop. In 1924, he patented a "Garden

**E**del's wedge cutter (left) speeded up the process of cutting wedges, needed in fitting wagon spokes snugly into wagon wheels. As Edel's advertising flier claimed, with Perfection Wedge Cutters, "pocket knife wedges are a thing of the past." The cutter was so easy to operate, the flyer said, that "a boy 13 years old made 650 wedges in one hour."



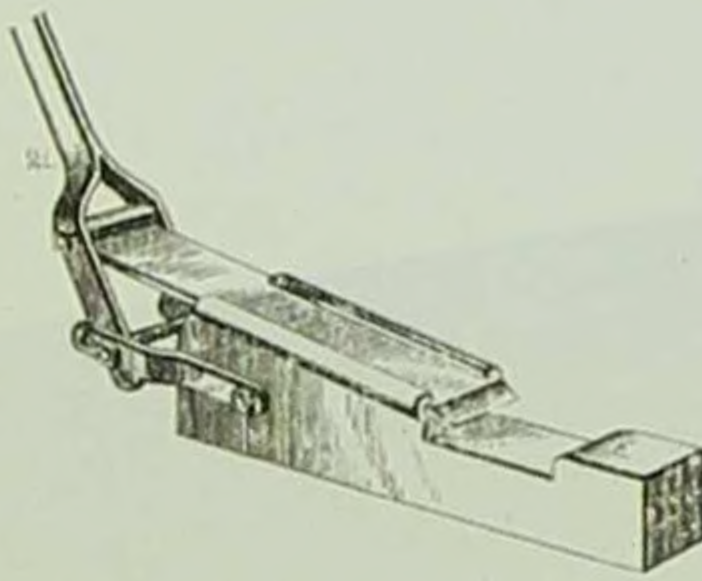
### Edel's Perfection Wedge Cutter

PATENTED OCT. 8, 1901

For Wagon and Carriage Makers  
and Repairers

M. EDEL, PATENTEE AND MAKER

HAVERHILL, IOWA



## EDEL'S PERFECTION WEDGE CUTTER

PATENTED OCT. 8, 1901.

For Wagon and Carriage  
Makers and Repairers

### Don't Waste Your Time Making Wedges With a Jack Knife.

Edel's Patent Wedge Cutter in the hands of a person with no experience will make from 500 to 1,000 perfect wedges per hour, with no other power than the hand, and so easy to operate that a boy 13 years old made 650 per hour.

The machine is so simple, durable and economical, that pocket knife making is a thing of the past.

One-half the ready made wedges you buy are not fit to use and you have leisure time from your work when a supply can be made of oak or hickory blocks in your own shop.

The machine makes uniform wedges from 3 inches long by 1 3-4 inches wide to other smaller required size.

### Directions for Operating.

Insert the forked lever to the knife; fasten machine to work bench through the hole in bed of machine; take straight grained oak or hickory blocks to the desired length of wedges, splitting these blocks in widths; stand so the edge of the knife is towards you and with your left hand back, then with the other hand insert wood block; bring

## M. Edel

General Blacksmithing

Maker of Specialties

Haverhill - - Iowa.

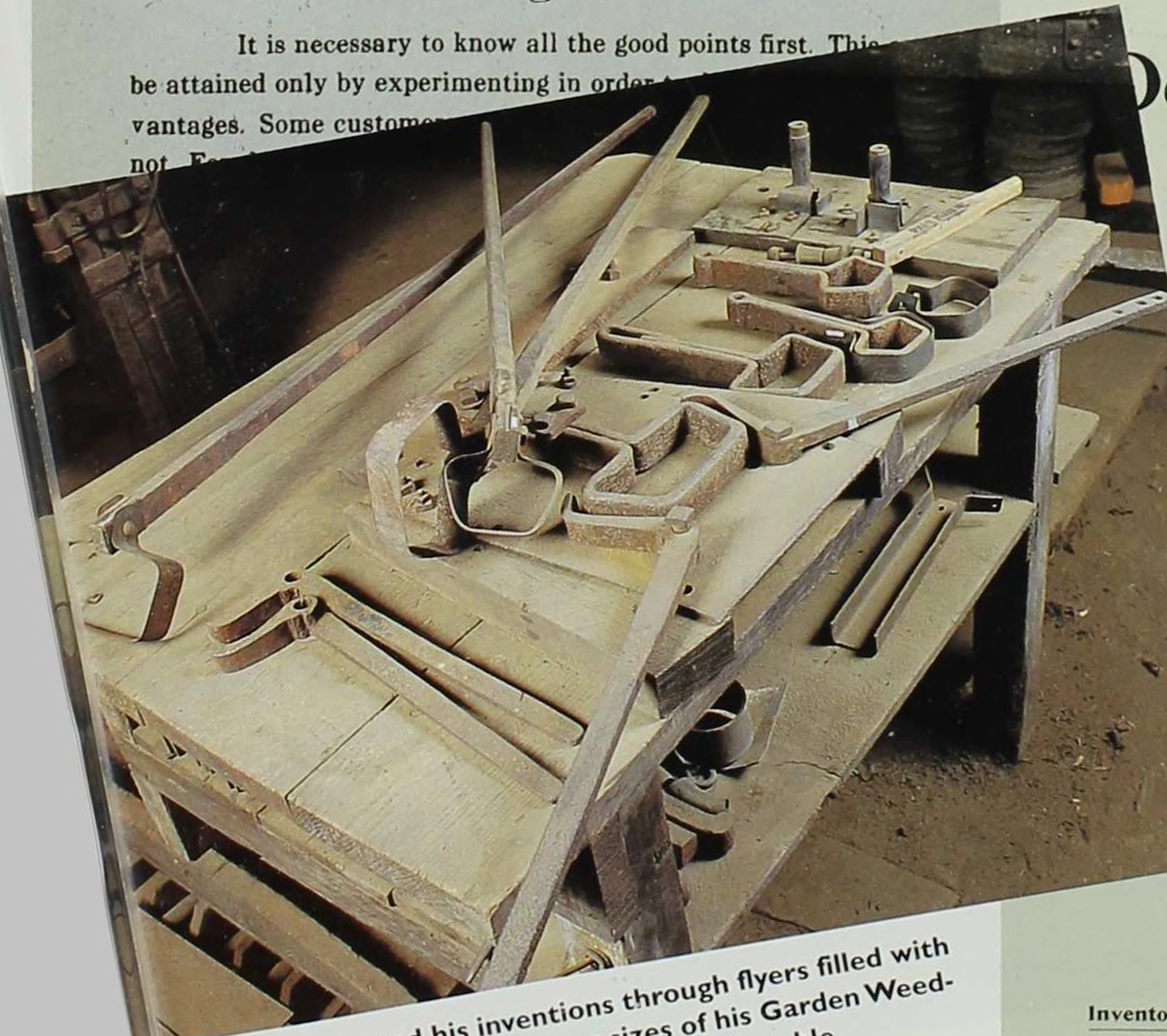
### Directions For Making and Selling

## M. Edel's Nut Pliers

A piece of three fourths inch mild steel, four inches long drawn out according to pattern will make one handle and bit complete. After making a quantity of these, select the two best fitting handles in shape and size, ream out the seat and holes, then fasten them together with a rivet made of seven-sixteenths inch mild steel rod.

### For Selling The Tool

It is necessary to know all the good points first. This can be attained only by experimenting in order to know the advantages. Some customers will not buy a tool until they have seen it in use.

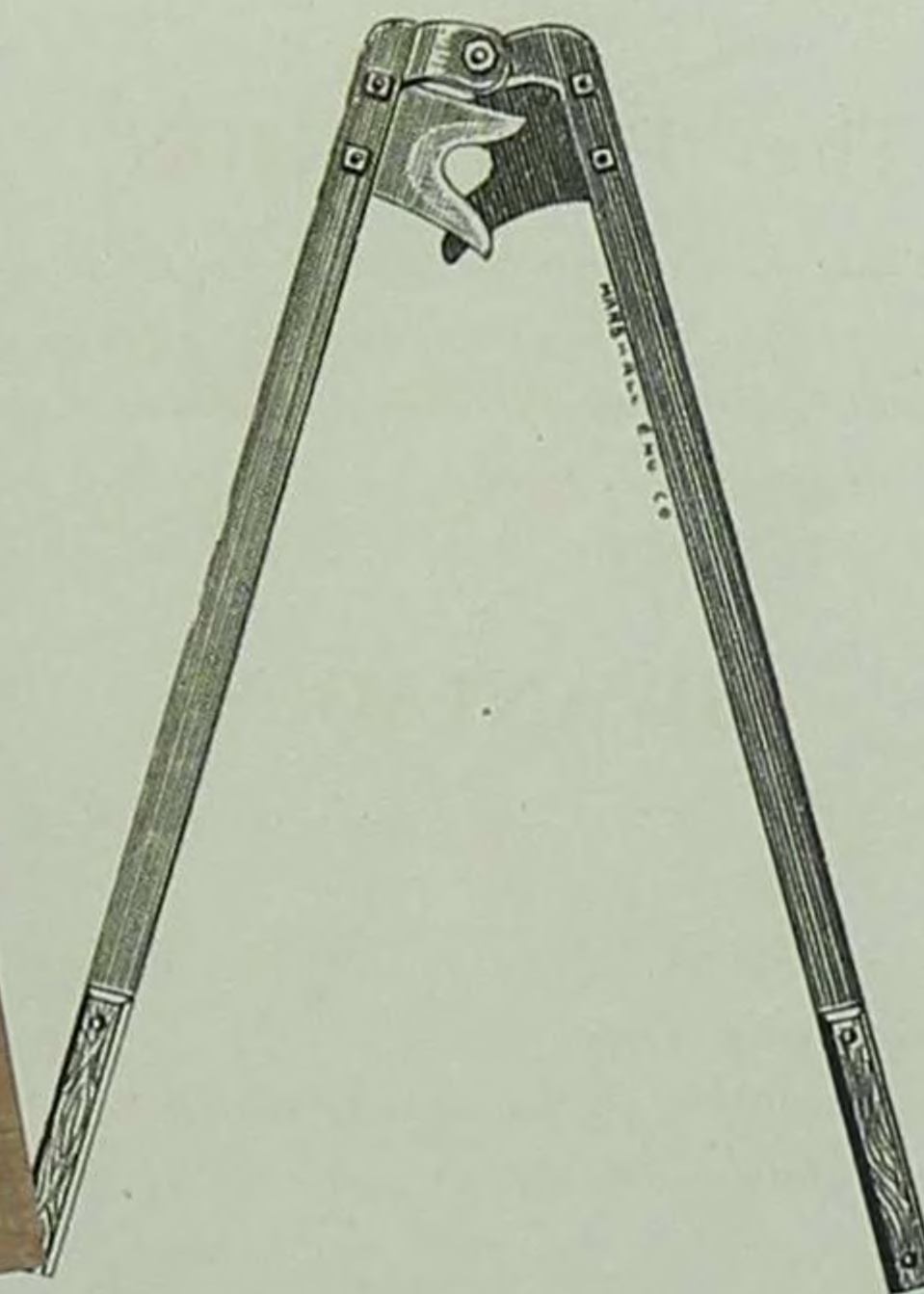


Edel marketed his inventions through flyers filled with testimonials. Above: various sizes of his Garden Weeding and Cultivating Hoes rest on a work table.

## M. EDEL'S "PERFECTION"

## Dehorning Clipper.

(PATENT APPLIED FOR.)



Upper one-half open

Ready to cut the horn on all sides

MANUFACTURED BY

## M. EDEL,

Inventor and Manufacturer.

HAVERHILL, IOWA.

HAROLD B. MILLER, PRINTER, MARSHALLTOWN, IA.







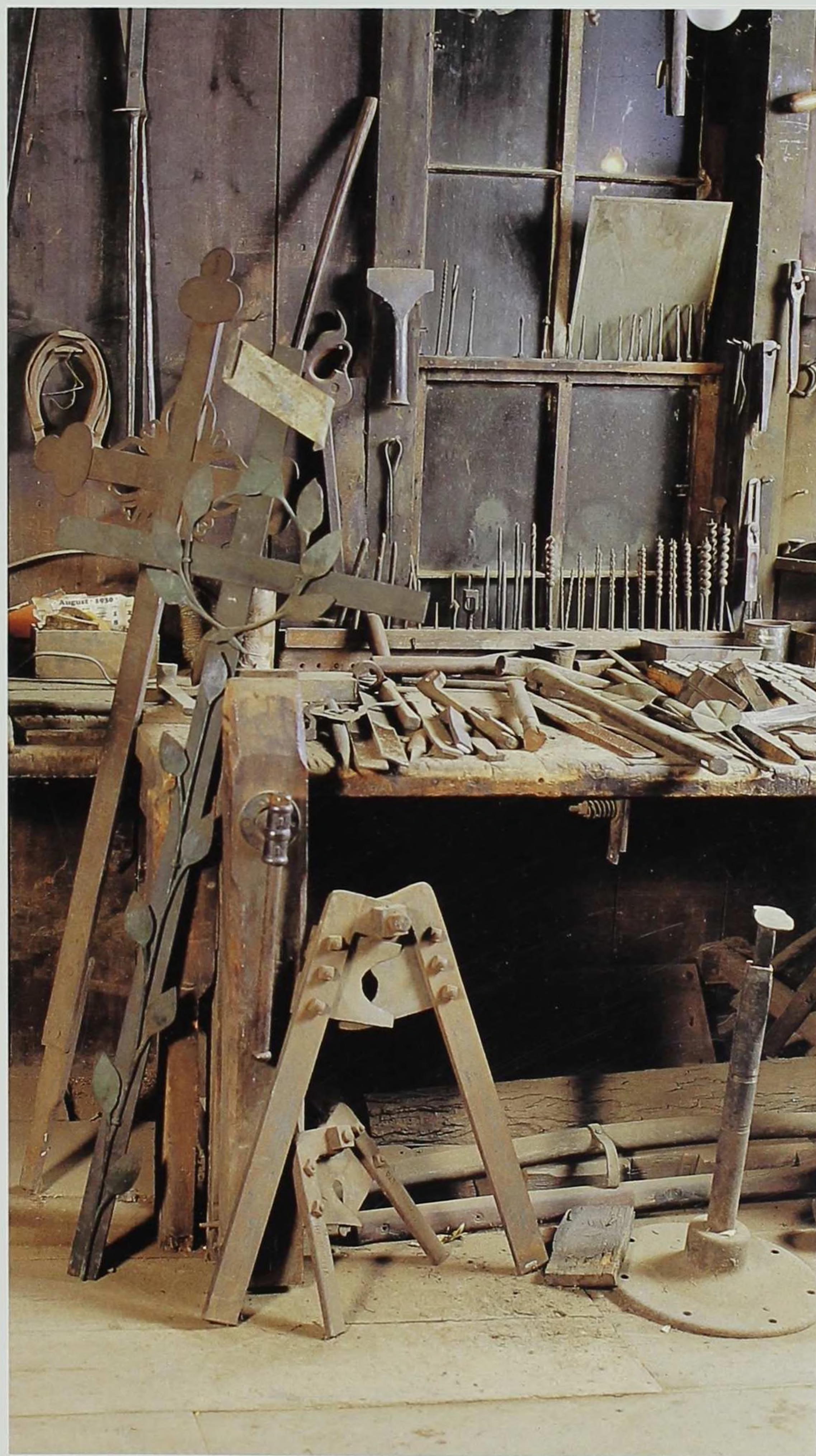
Weeding and Cultivating Hoe," available in three sizes.

Edel also designed, manufactured, and sold grave marker crosses. This became a major portion of his business, especially in later years. The style of his crosses evolved over the years—from a very plain staff in the early 1900s, to welded leaves, climbing vines, and ornamental wreaths and corners in later years.

Although Edel's crosses appear to be unique in Iowa, similar crosses appear in the southern part of Germany, Edel's native land. Yet it is uncertain whether he learned blacksmithing in Germany; he emigrated when he was 13, probably still too young to have completed a blacksmithing apprenticeship.

Earlier in the 19th century, blacksmiths often made items that were ornamental as well as utilitarian—trivets and fireplace tools, brackets and locks, gates and hasps. But by Edel's era, blacksmiths were more likely repairing factory-made items than making useful and beautiful objects themselves. Edel's cemetery crosses, however, show that he used his

**Left:** From these eight woodcuts, Edel printed advertising flyers to show the variety of cemetery cross designs available. Metal leaves on a stalk lie nearby. **Below:** one of Edel's crosses at the Haverhill Cemetery.



**T**wo metal cemetery crosses lean against a vise. On one, leaves twine up the shaft and circle into a wreath. (Note the two pairs of long-handled cattle dehorning tools in the foreground, and in the background, other tools of Edel's craft.)



SHS (DES MOINES); COURTESY EVELYN BLUM



artistic talents well into the 20th century.

Edel's long-term success as an inventor, businessman, and blacksmith lay in his ability to change with the times and use new technologies. His shop is a mosaic of old methods and techniques meshed with the new. As new sources of power became available, Edel harnessed them for his own use.

Around 1912, he redesigned the shop to accommodate a six-horsepower Sandow single-piston oil lines gasoline engine manufactured in Waterloo. A leather belt connected the engine's belt pulley to a line shaft suspended from the ceiling on the shop's east side. Several pulleys mounted on the shaft transferred the turning power to a handmade band saw, table saw, and a swing cut-off saw. The engine also powered a grinder, trip hammer, and drillpress.

When electricity arrived in Haverhill in 1912, Edel harnessed its power as well, installing incandescent lights and replacing a hand-cranked, cast-iron blower for the forge with a forced-air electric blower.

With the arrival of gasoline engines and electricity, sharpening, grinding, boring, and drilling—as well as manufacturing wooden wagon parts and other jobs previously performed by hand—were now completed in less time and with less sheer muscle power.

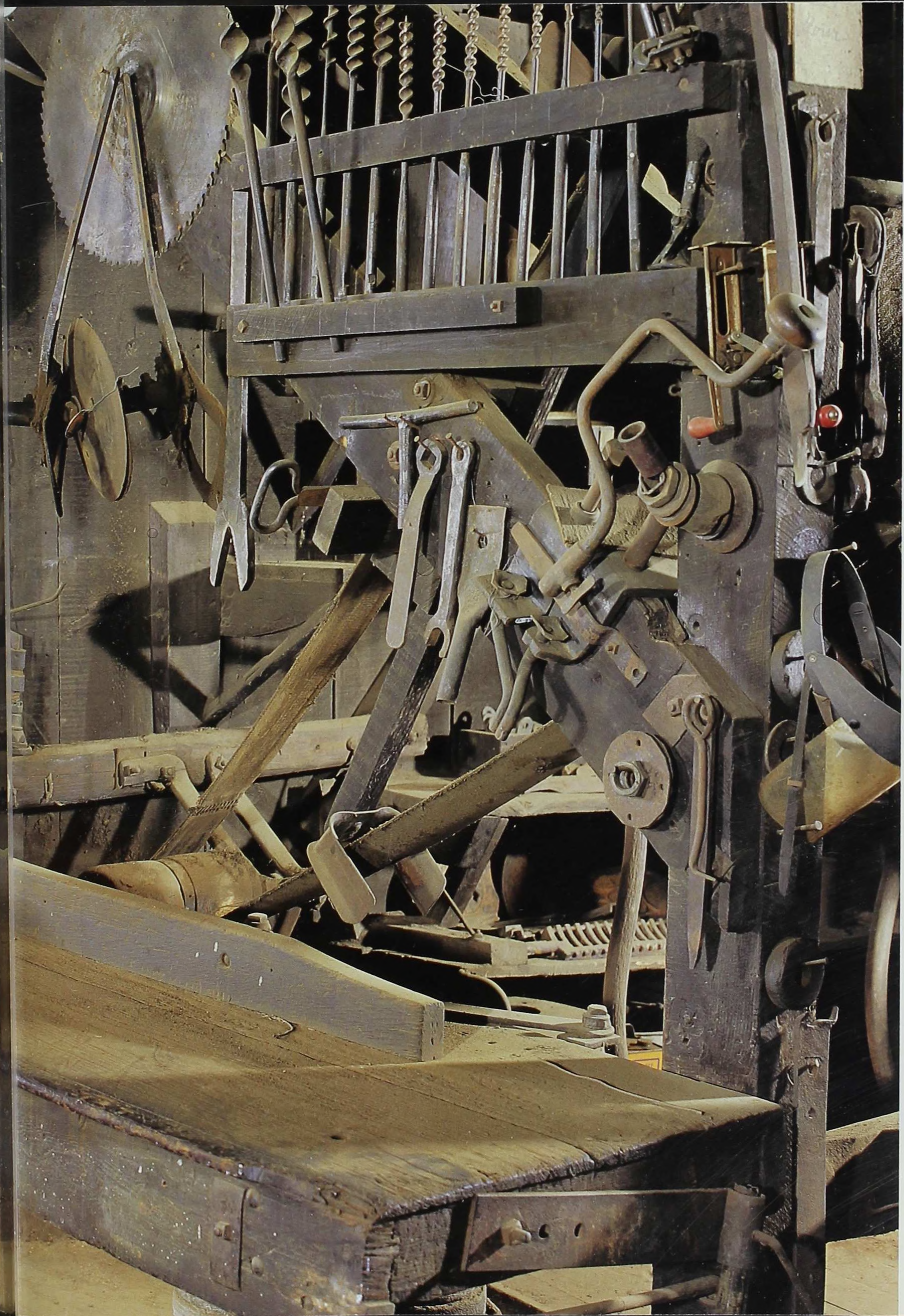
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**E**del was an orderly man as well as an inventive one. Behind his farrier workspace, his folding desk is divided into pigeonholes labeled with the letters of the alphabet. A December 1939 calendar still hangs in the recesses of the desk. A metal arm with a pointed finger can be adjusted at the elbow to point to a specific date (see detail on opposite page).



repair garage onto the west side of the blacksmith shop, perhaps motivated by the building of the Lincoln Highway about eight miles to the north. The garage was operated by Louis, who at age 17 went to Des Moines for training in automotive repair. Edel's second son, Anton (or "Tony"), also worked in the garage for a short time.

Yet even as his shop began serving automobile owners, Matthew Edel continued to shoe horses and do general blacksmithing. But as the 20th century advanced, the traditional role of the blacksmith waned. On farms, the power of draft horses gradually shifted to gasoline-powered tractors, which required the skilled hands of a mechanic, rather than a blacksmith, to keep their many cylinders operating smoothly. Between 1880 and 1940 in Marshall County, the number of draft horses on farms plummeted from almost 12,000 to 7,700. By mid-century, most American blacksmith shops had evolved into acetylene or carbon arc welding shops. In nearby Marshalltown, for example, the 1903 city directory listed eight different blacksmith shops. By 1939 only two were listed, and in actuality both were machine shops:

When Matthew Edel died in 1940, his son Louis left the blacksmith shop largely untouched. Louis's own auto garage business, which eventually included gasoline and tire sales, flourished until 1952, when he moved to Waterloo. In 1964, Louis returned to Haverhill and reopened the garage.

Then, after Louis's death in 1978, the blacksmith shop sat undisturbed and the grounds became overgrown. The Edel family's efforts to preserve the blacksmith shop, the house, and the summer kitchen eventually



led to its current status as a well-maintained historic site, open to the public.

**F**or Iowa's older farmers the familiar ring of the blacksmith's anvil still lives in their memories. But for younger Iowans, blacksmithing has become the substance of legend and nostalgia, a skill occasionally demonstrated at craft fairs and at historical reenactments.

In 1940, the year of Matthew Edel's death, the U.S. Department of Agriculture published its annual yearbook. It described the role of gasoline-powered machinery, electricity, tractors, and other technologies in rural life. Certainly

the title of the yearbook—*Farmers in a Changing World*—would not have come as a surprise to Matthew Edel, whose own career spanned both the glory days and the twilight of blacksmithing in America. During 57 years as a rural blacksmith, he had witnessed the changes, one hammer-strike at a time. ❖

*The author, Michael W. Vogt, is a curator and museum technician at the Iowa Gold Star Museum at Camp Dodge in Johnston, and was formerly the museum director of the Historical Society of Marshall County.*

*Photographer Chuck Greiner lives in Nevada, Iowa. His photographs have appeared frequently in this magazine.*

#### NOTE ON SOURCES

Major sources used include city and county histories and city directories for Haverhill, Marshalltown, and Marshall County; historical records and account books from Edel's business; the teachers' guide for the Edel Blacksmith Shop (State Historical Society of Iowa, 1996); the site's National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form, prepared in 1982 by Ralph Christian; and interviews with Eugene Pippin, the resident blacksmith at Edel Blacksmith Shop, and Steven Ohrn, historic sites manager for the State Historical Society of Iowa.



# "Everything by Hand"

## A community remembers its blacksmith

by Donna Walker

**M**atthew Edel shoed their horses, fixed their wagons, mended their farm implements, and made their tools.

"Years ago, a community couldn't exist without blacksmiths," said Eugene Pippin, docent and resident blacksmith at the Matthew Edel Blacksmith Shop, now a historic site in Haverhill, Iowa, owned by the State Historical So-

ciety of Iowa. "We had no hardware stores. Oh, there were a few entrepreneurs—we were fortunate in Marshalltown to have some. But in communities like this, if you needed a butcher knife, you went to a blacksmith."

"There used to be a blacksmith shop every five miles, back in the Thirties," William C. Roads, of Marshalltown, recalled. "There was one in Albion, one in Liscomb, and one in-between. Every little town had a blacksmith shop."

"He used to shoe a lot of horses," said Ambrose Rosemeier, a Haverhill resident who remembers Matthew Edel. Rosemeier was 13 when he first brought his pony to Edel's shop for shoeing. "I lived north of Haverhill and went to school at St. Joseph's. I rode a pony to school and in the fall we'd bring it to the shop to get shoes on, then in the summer he'd take them off. They're still hanging there today."

Along the ceiling of Edel's shop, on taut wires separated about every two feet by ceiling joists, hung the shoes. Each section was for a different customer, noted on a small piece of paper (see above). "Edel put a tag on it with a man's name," Rosemeier explained. "My dad's name was there."

In fact, "the names up there



PHOTO BY CHUCK GREINER

are a 'Who's Who of Marshall County' for the Haverhill area at that time," said Eugene Pippin. Tags bear familiar names like Neuroth, Krier, Kunkel, Pille, Kopel, Stalzer, Dankbar, and so on.

In giving tours of the Edel blacksmith shop, Pippin believes he has "come to have a feel for Matthew and for his contribution to the community of Haverhill both as a skilled smith and as a member of the community."

"He was a success in business," Pippin continued, noting that Edel's shop "grew from a single room to the size it is now. He branched out to woodworking, farm wagons, buggies, sleds, and wheels."

Another lifelong Haverhill resident, the late Ed Kopel, remembered the man. "Every kid had his own sled," said Kopel. "We'd break runners and that stuff and he'd fix it."

Edel, Kopel said, was "strictly shop." "He didn't go very much. He was always a doing something." That included general



**M**atthew Edel, in the late 1930s. He was Haverhill's blacksmith for 57 years.



blacksmithing, said Kopel, like sharpening plowshares and disc blades in the spring of each year.

"He used to do everything by hand," Kopel remembered. "If he was doing something and needed a wrench, he'd just stop and make one. He had very few tools like we have today."

Eugene Pippin also admires Edel's ability to make just about anything. "He was efficient enough that if someone brought in a farm implement that didn't work, he'd look at it, evaluate how to make repairs, and spend a half a day making jigs and fixtures to enable him to do a repeat job. This, to me, is the epitome of resourcefulness, preparation, planning, and foresight."

Edel, a master of organization,

set up the shop for efficiency right down to placing the anvil and forge, the heart of it all, in the southeastern corner, where the sun's heat would not intensify the ambient temperature of the room. This, of course, was in the newer section of the shop, which also had a hard-packed dirt floor, to reduce the chance of fire.

"I remember it had the nicest, softest, finest dirt to sit there and play in," granddaughter Evelyn Blum said, "if Grandpa would let me—if he wasn't busy and there weren't pieces of metal flying. He didn't want me to get hurt."

The soft side of Matthew Edel emerged when Blum got to talking about her grandpa. "He liked to have fun," she remembered.

"The family played instruments,

they all did. Grandpa played the violin, I think. They enjoyed music and made their own good time."

In 1940, when Matthew Edel died, his son Louis kept the shop open for another dozen years only to support his auto garage or to help out a neighbor. Later, Louis sold his own belongings from the garage, but he left everything in the blacksmith shop just as it was—just as his father, Matthew, had left it.

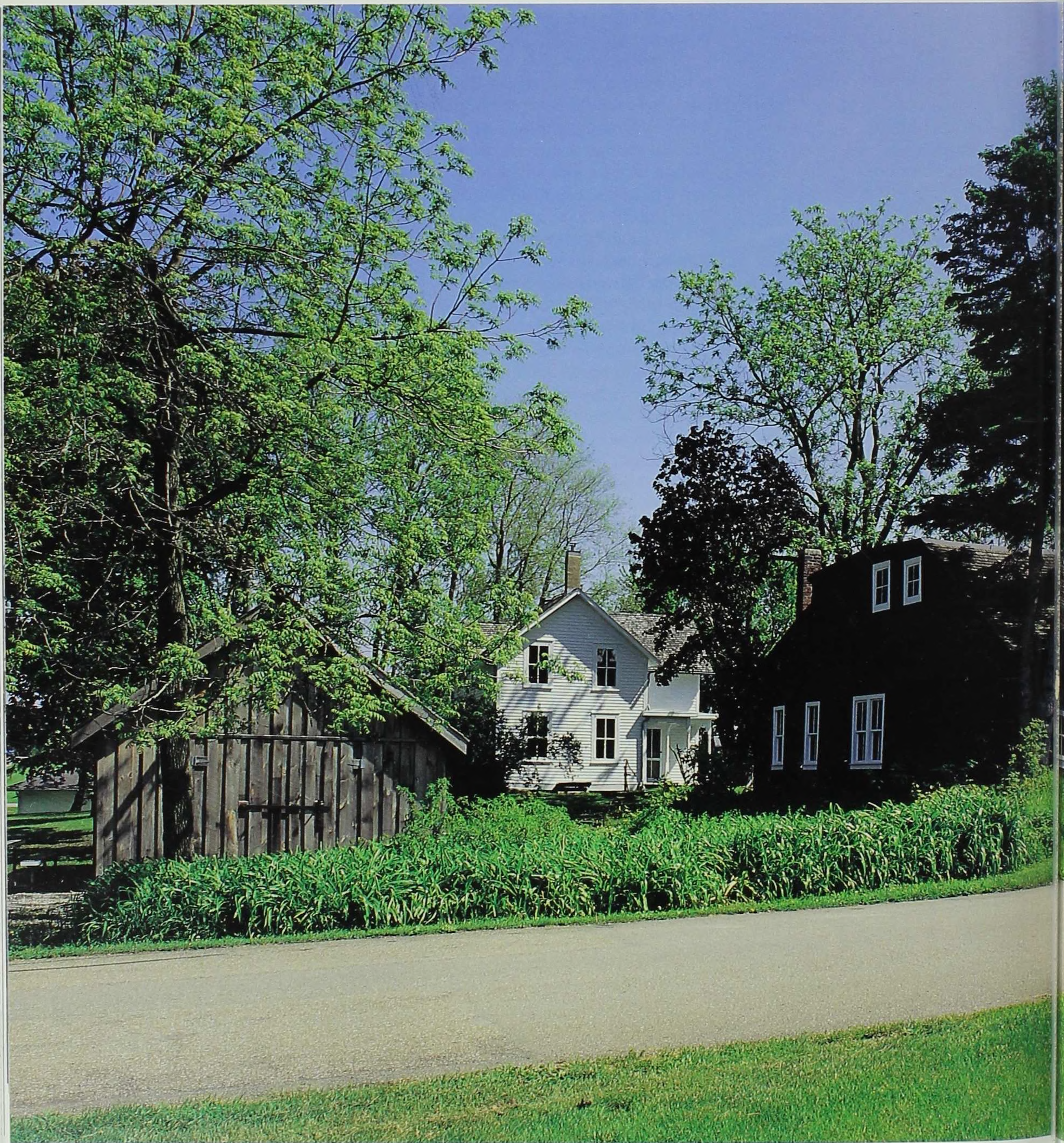
It's all there still. Some say it's as if Matthew just stepped out for a moment. ♦

*Donna Walker is a freelance writer in Marshalltown, Iowa. A longer version of this article appeared in the August 1996 Marshalltimes.*



**T**he Edel family, about 1903. Front: Maria holding Leo, Louis, Albert, Matthew. Back: Martin, John, Joseph, Tony, and Mary. The nine-room house was built in the early 1890s. The sons took care of a huge family garden, according to Edel's granddaughter Evelyn Blum, while his wife and daughter did the housework—"the washing, laundry, cleaning, canning, cooking, and sewing." When Edel's wife died in 1915, daughter Mary (or "Mayme") assumed all the housekeeping for her father and brothers.





SHS (DES MOINES). PHOTO BY CHUCK GREINER

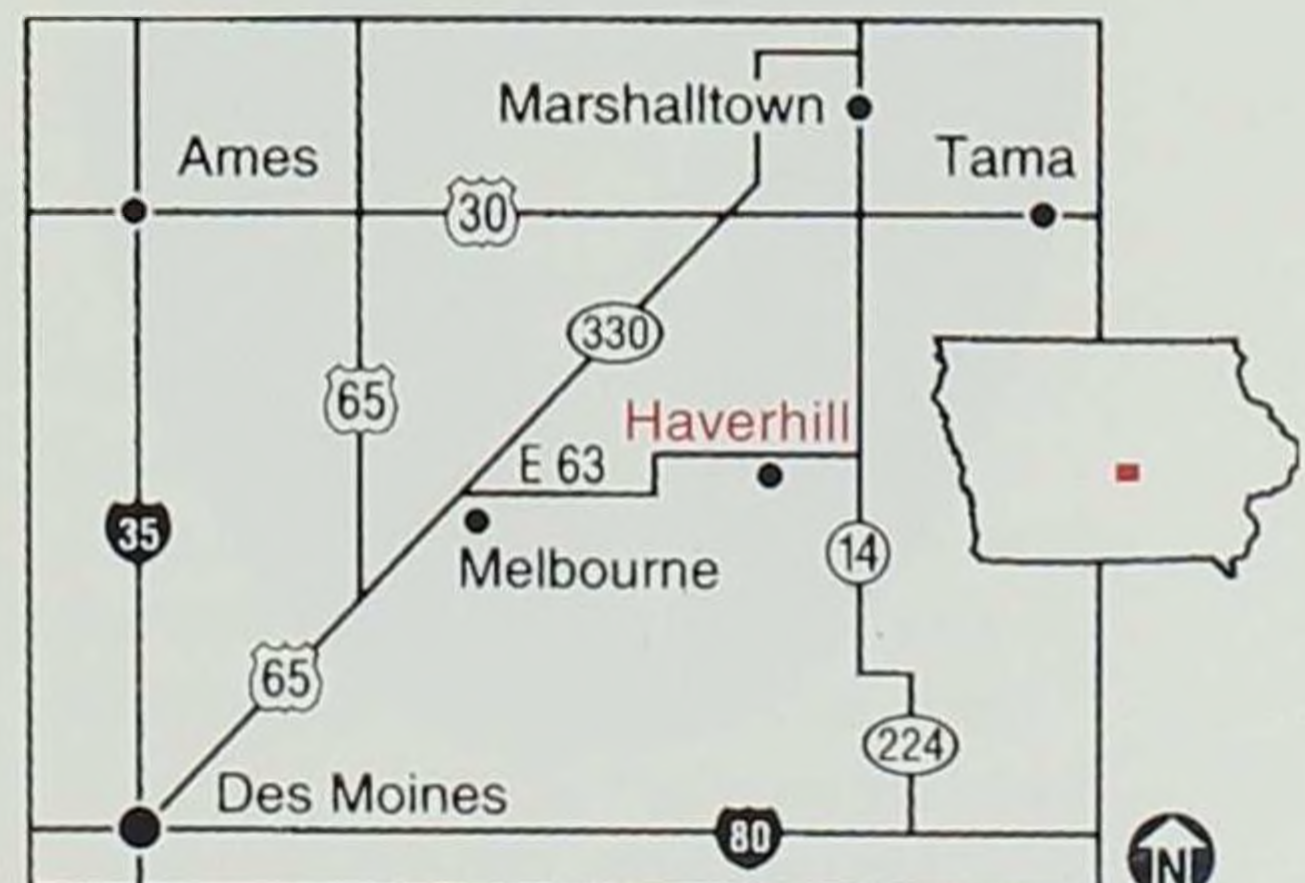


# Tour the Matthew Edel Blacksmith Shop Today

If Matthew Edel were to return to Haverhill today, he'd find his shop much as he left it when he died in 1940. And so will you, when you take a step back into the past and visit this fascinating historic site, owned and preserved by the State Historical Society of Iowa.

Tour the blacksmith shop, hear stories from the resident blacksmith about Iowa before the days of automobiles and tractors, and walk the grounds surrounding the Edel family home. (The small building on the far left was built in 1996 by the Upper Midwest Blacksmith Association. Equipped with a forge and tools of the trade, it is used for demonstrations, classes, and meetings.)

The Matthew Edel Blacksmith Shop is open daily, noon to 4 p.m., Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day weekend. For more information or to schedule a group tour, contact the local manager: Historical Society of Marshall County, Box 304, Marshalltown, Iowa 50158, phone 515-752-6664.





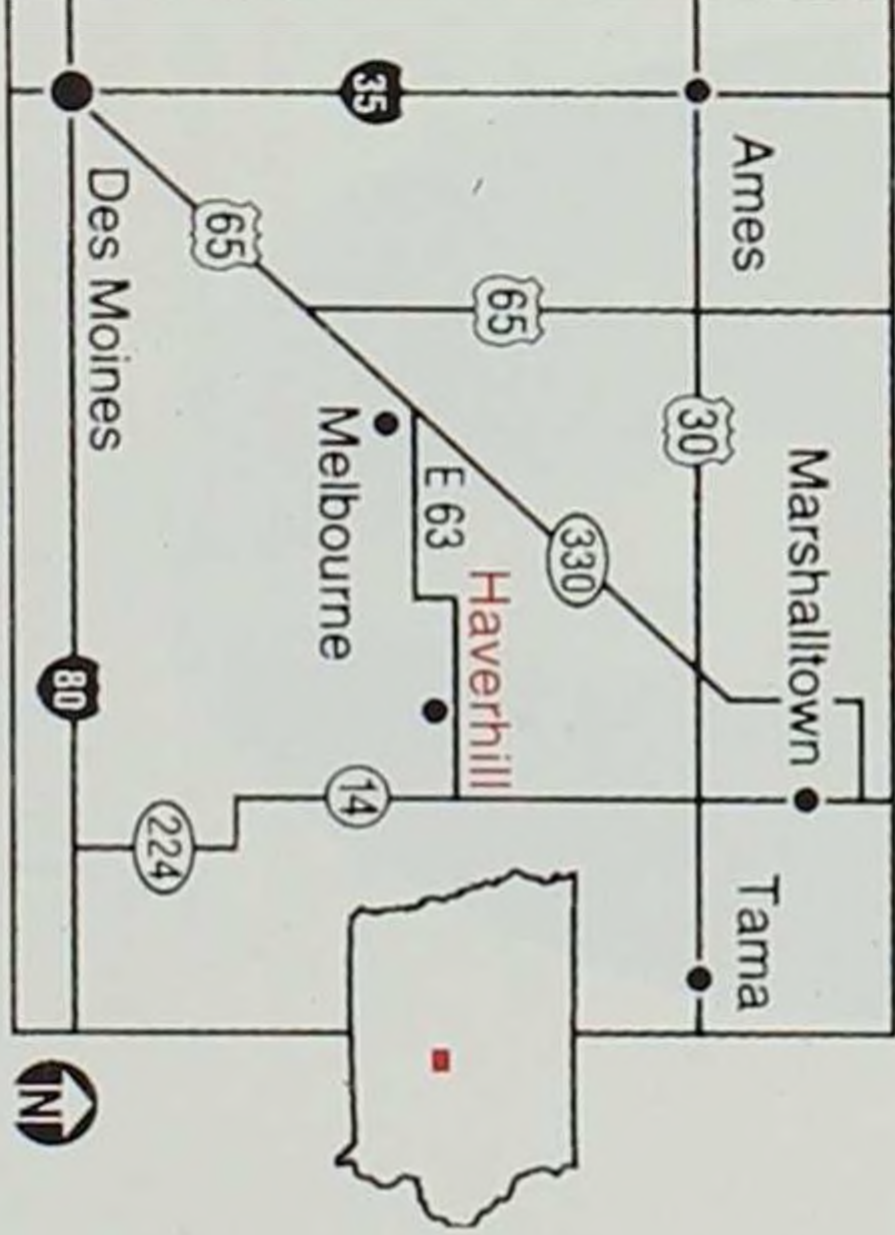


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SPRIG (DES MOINES) PHOTO BY CHLOE GREENER



Late in the summer of 1905, 45-year-old G. B. Hippee and his 15-year-old son, Herndon, headed north on an automobile trip. Their destination was Spirit Lake, where G. B. and his wife, Minnie, owned a cottage on the west side of the lake, and his parents owned a cottage at Orleans, the beach and town at the south end of Big Spirit Lake. There was just enough time for a trip to the lake before Herndon returned to school at the Shadduck Military Academy in Minnesota.

The Hippees were driving a 1905 Franklin automobile. The Franklin was air cooled. It had neither a water jacket around the engine nor a radiator, so with less weight, the car had more power. The car had been shipped to Des Moines in pieces and assembled in the yard of the Des Moines Street Railway Company. Hippee was the company's general manager.

Given the condition of Iowa roads in 1905, the trip from Des Moines to Spirit Lake proved to be quite an adventure, as you'll see in the following account written after the trip by G. B. Hippee. Hippee's grandson, Luther L. Hill, Jr., brought it to our attention, and it is with his permission that we reprint it below, edited slightly for publication.

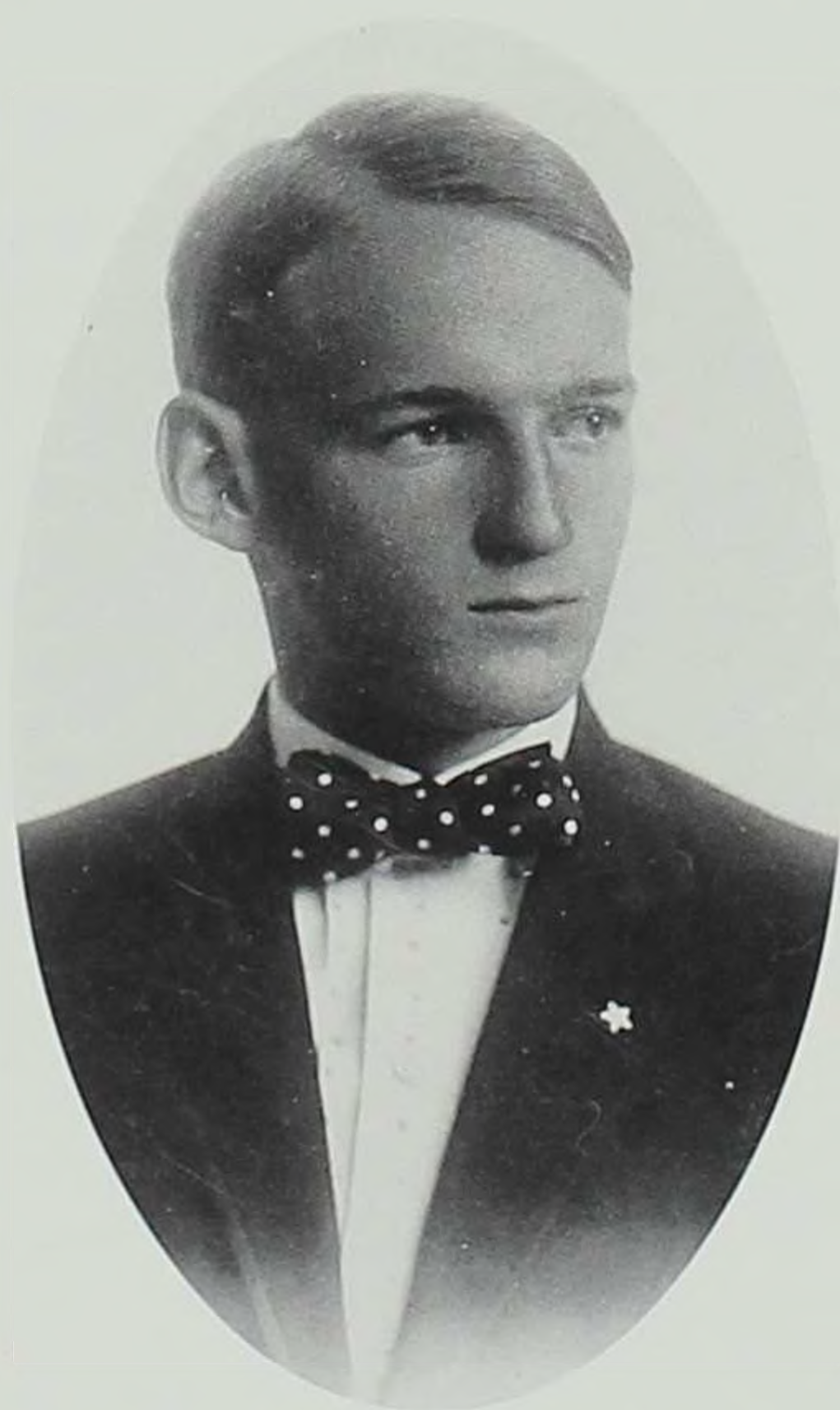
—The Editor



G. B. Hippee

# A 1905 Auto Trip to Spirit Lake

by G. B. Hippee



Herndon Hippee

## Wednesday

Herndon and I left Des Moines at 6:40 o'clock, August 31, 1905. Everything worked all right until we got about two or three miles east of Waukee, when we struck the worst piece of road I ever had to drive a machine over. It seems that the graders were working on this road the Saturday previous and had run their road scrapers and plows over it, and it was nothing but a mixture of soft earth and big clods and everything of that kind that had been thrown up in the center, and the heavy rains on Saturday night came on top of this and they had not touched it since; it was practically a road with no bottom. We had to put chains on our wheels to get traction to pull through. It took us almost three hours to make the

three miles into Waukee. Before we got through we were both in good swearing mood, and I did not blame Herndon for swearing some, because I did it myself, and felt like doing a good deal more. After we got to Waukee we took our chains off, and from there to Ortonville the road was in splendid shape. At Ortonville we turned north and the road to Dallas Center was good, and from Dallas Center to Woodward the roads were poor, and we had considerable trouble before we got into Woodward. We reached Woodward about 1:30 and left there about 2:30. From Woodward to Ogden, thence north to Pilot Mound, thence to Dayton, the road was simply elegant. No asphalt pavement could have been better. The machine could run at



the limit of its speed, and we let it run. This is a beautiful country; well settled, and the farmers are all rich and well-to-do. They all have good houses and barns and their places are well fenced and kept up. It is the garden spot of the State of Iowa. Going into Dayton we got our first view of the beauties of a rough, rolling country. We went down a long hill, crossed a small river or creek, to Dayton, and this was a very pretty, scenic effect. One that pleased Herndon very much. From Dayton the road angles from the east over to Lehigh, which is a coal mining town on the Upper Des Moines River. It is about eighteen miles south of Fort Dodge. The banks at this point are very high, and very beautiful. It resembles a great deal the banks of the Hudson. They are abrupt and steep and covered with heavy foliage, and it is one of the most beautiful sights I have ever seen; in fact I do not believe there is anything handsomer on the Hudson than the bluffs on the Des Moines River going into and coming out of Lehigh. The road winds and twists down these bluffs to get into the town and to the valley. It reminds one very much of one of the mountain roads in Colorado, as it twists and winds around to climb the mountain. At Lehigh we crossed to the east bank of the Des Moines River and climbed a very steep hill. While the hill was steep the machine had no trouble whatever in ascending the grade. As the sun was shining almost directly up the river, the view from this hill was simply magnificent. Herndon wanted to stop and camp out at this place, he was so taken with the country. From Lehigh our road wound round in a northwest direction to Fort Dodge. Just east of Fort Dodge we passed through what is called Gypsum City, where there are several of the

largest gypsum mills in the United States. These mills are all white. They are white from the gypsum dust that covers them, as gypsum is a rock that is ground and used as plaster for the walls of our houses. From Gypsum City we ran into Fort Dodge in a very few minutes, and got there about 7 p.m., put our machine in the stable at the Duncombe House, and got our supper and room. Fort Dodge is a very pretty place, with several

ful, but it was anything but beautiful this morning. We had to run on our slow speed all the time. Along about 1 o'clock we stopped at a farm house and got a lady, after talking to her awhile, to get us something to eat. She got us each a cup of tea, fried eggs and apple sauce. Herndon was very enthusiastic. He said it was the best meal he ever had eaten. Of course it was because he was exceedingly hungry. After our dinner was over

**The road was simply elegant. No asphalt pavement could have been better.**

well paved brick and asphalt streets. While we had a little hard luck when starting out of Des Moines by striking bad roads, yet we made very good time this day, making one hundred and two miles, as shown by the register on our machine. The weather on this day was delightful; not a cloud in the sky and was nice and warm. This was Wednesday night.

#### *Thursday*

Along about 4 o'clock Thursday morning, it did not rain at Fort Dodge, it simply poured, and kept it up until 10:00 o'clock in the morning, but after looking the ground over, Herndon and I concluded we would tackle it, so we chained our wheels again and started out. We left Fort Dodge, crossing the river, going to the west bank and climbing another very steep hill to get out of the city, and then took what is known as the Old Humboldt Stage Road, along the west bank of the Des Moines River. This road in nice weather would have been beauti-

we worked on our machine a little while, adjusting it and getting it in shape, [and] succeeded in breaking one of the walking beams on one of the exhaust valves, but we had an extra one so it did not delay us. We then left the farm house and went about two miles north and turned east. We were about nine miles from Pioneer. It took us all afternoon to make nine miles through the mud. We got to Pioneer about 7:00 o'clock in the evening. This is a little station on the Des Moines and Fort Dodge road. We stayed all night in Pioneer, and I think there was another rain that night. I slept pretty well and did not hear it, but the roads looked like there had been more rain.

#### *Friday*

We wanted to go from Pioneer to Gilmore City, as Gilmore City is only nine miles from Pioneer, and the railroad track was perfectly straight so we thought it a good idea to get on the railway right-of-way, this we did, and started



down the track. The muddy roads were bad, but this piece of track of the Rock Island was worse. They have not ballasted their road there in the last twenty years from the looks of it. From the ends of the ties the bank dropped off in some places two or three feet. We would go a little ways and then stick, and the differential gear would catch on the ends of the ties and stick, and we would have to pry or jack it off the ties. We soon saw we could not make this. We came near a crossroad, headed the machine down an embankment, and ran a short distance until a fence stopped us. The railroad fence; but we had hammers and axes and simply knocked a board off and took the wire cutters and cut off the wires and went through. We put the board back and left the wires go. From this point we went by mud road to Gilmore City. We got there about 11:30. We stopped in front of a pretty good looking blacksmith shop. I wanted to get the walking beam I broke at the farm house fixed and the blacksmith did a very good job, and made a new one for me. Previous to this time, I had had considerable trouble with No. 4 cylinder, and after talking with them in the blacksmith shop, I found there was quite a gas engine expert, named Heath, as you find in all these smaller towns. They are

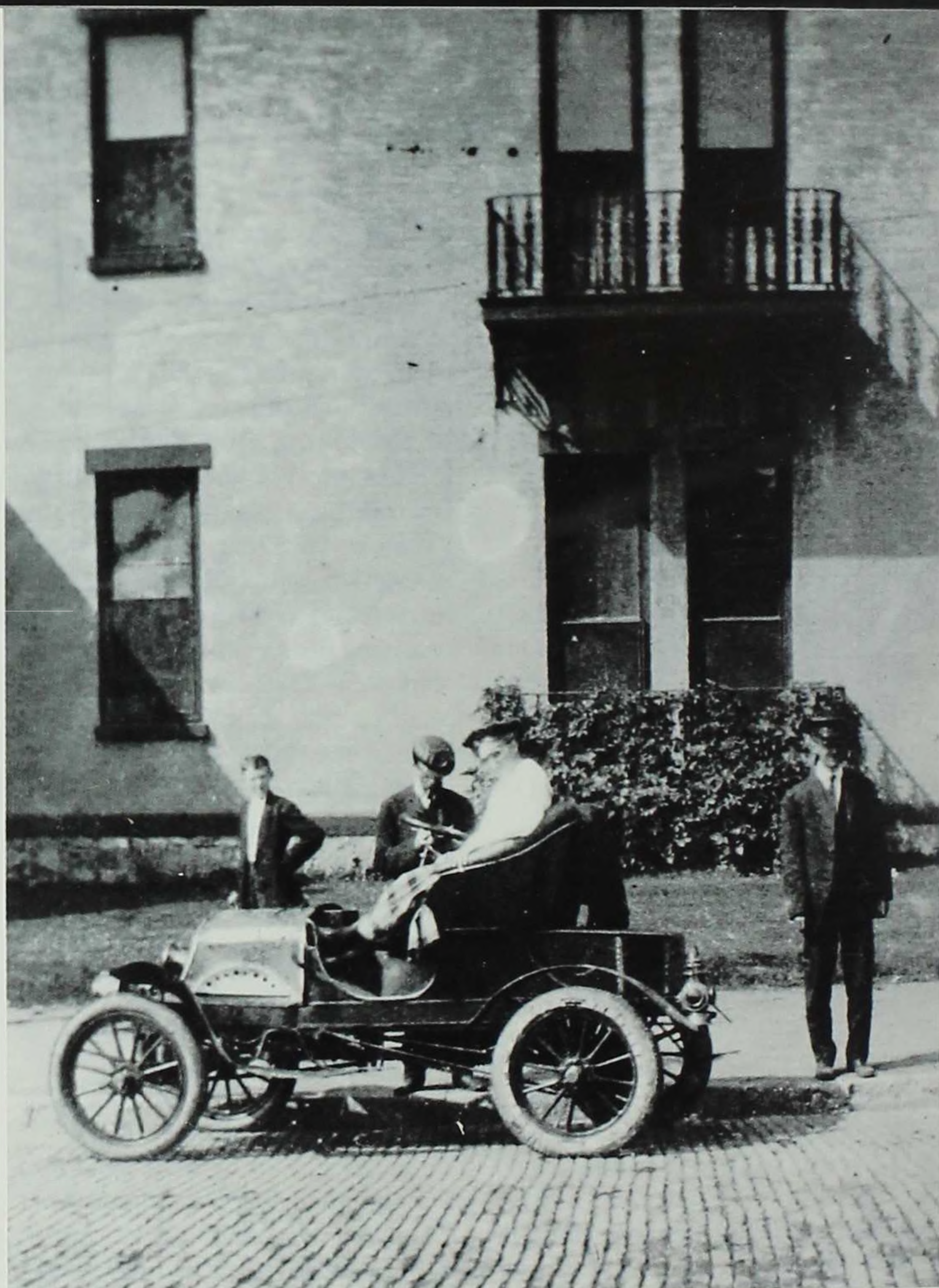
**If we had ever gotten into one of them, we could not have gotten out for a week. We simply had to run slow and dodge the mud holes.**

more familiar with the gas engine than the people in the city, for the reason that they use more of these small engines for the purpose of pumping water, grinding feed,

told him that was easily fixed, we could take it off. We took it off and it worked fine. We thought we would then put it back, so back we put it and it would not work.

etc. I found the man and he looked over my machine, and finally decided the exhaust pipe was stopped up in the No. 4 cylinder. I

This stumped him. He did not know what to make of it. Finally he suggested that if it will work without a pipe, why don't you cut it out and leave an open air exhaust. I thought this a very sensible piece of advice so I took off the pipe and simply let the cylinders all exhaust in the open air. This makes a noise like a battery of light artillery coming up. You can hear it for two miles. It is a quick, sharp report, almost exactly like a rapid firing gun; but just the same the machine ran and ran fast. We left Gilmore City about 3:15, got to Mallard, Iowa, a small



**Herndon Hippee sits at the wheel of the Franklin, parked in Fort Dodge.**

ALL PHOTOS PAGES 22-27 COURTESY OF LUTHER L. HILL, JR.



station on the Des Moines and Fort Dodge, at 7 p.m., and stayed all night there.

#### *Saturday*

We left Mallard the next morning at 9 o'clock a.m., through Spencer and when about three miles north of Spencer to make the thing complete for us, and be sure we had not missed any trouble, a tire bursted. This meant another delay, getting down, taking off the tire, patching the inner tube and then put it back again. While this is not necessarily a hard job, it is a slow one, and it was the delay we

were just sitting down to supper, but they heard us a long ways off and were out to meet us as we came down the hill, and we came down the hill, flying, too. This was 7 p.m., Saturday, September 3d. Our total mileage on this trip from Des Moines to Spirit Lake was two hundred and twenty-six miles. The first day we made one hundred and two miles, the second day thirty-six miles in the mud, and the last day we made sixty-six miles; but the machine was none the worse for it, and was in perfect running shape when we got to Spirit Lake.

I spent most of my time at

machine, so I just disconnected the gear entirely and did not have any reverse to my machine. We got off the road in leaving Ruthven a couple of miles, but we got back on the main road to Emmetsburg. We went right through Emmetsburg and took the road direct south to Mallard.

#### *Monday*

We left Mallard the next morning, ran to Rolfe, thence to Plover, thence to Gilmore City, thence direct east from Gilmore City to the Humboldt road. This is a splendid road from Gilmore City east, well graded and the greater portion of the way has been graveled. We made lively time on this. The Humboldt road was not so good. It is rough and I found that the night before they had quite a rain there, but it did not give us much trouble. When we struck the Humboldt road we turned south and rode directly into Fort Dodge. We got there at 1:15, went to the Duncombe House and got dinner. At 2:15 we left Fort Dodge and started for Lehigh. We found some bad roads between there and Lehigh. We had to go over a portion of the road they were working on with road scrapers, but got through without any accidents. As we got to the long, steep hill going into Lehigh, we had the reverse disconnected on our gear and could not use that as an emergency brake. I said to Herndon, as we were going down this grade, "What would become of us if this foot brake would go back on us?" He said, "You would use your slow speed clutch." I said, "Would that hold us?" He said, "It would stop us going so fast." I said, "Let's try it," and with that put my hand on the lever and threw her into slow motion. Herndon

**As we left Ruthven the infernal reverse gear got balky and this time locked the machine, so I just disconnected the gear entirely and did not have any reverse to my machine.**

swore about more than the puncture. From Fostoria to Milford we struck a rotten road, and it certainly was a bad piece of road, muddy and full of ruts. If we had ever gotten into one of them, we could not have gotten out for a week. We simply had to run slow and dodge the mud holes. But after we left Milford the roads were good and we sailed into Okoboji and thence into Spirit Lake. After we pulled up the long hill north of Milford at the top, we got our first view of Okoboji Lake. It is a beautiful sight. We did not stop at Spirit Lake village except to send a telegram to Des Moines and stop for a few minutes at Father's and Mother's cottage to speak to them, but went right straight to our own cottage. Harry [Harry Polk, Minnie's younger brother] and George [George Polk Hippee, G. B. and Minnie's oldest son]

Spirit Lake getting the cottage in shape, the wood blinds fixed on better, so that thieves and fishermen could not break in so easily next winter.

#### *Sunday*

We left Spirit Lake on our return trip Sunday, September 11th, at 12:40. It took about seven minutes to run over to Father's and Mother's cottage and say good-bye to them, and then sail out for Spirit Lake. When just south of Spirit Lake something began to go wrong with our reverse gears. I did not like the sound of them. I got out, tightened that up, and everything went all right. We went through Okoboji, down through Spencer, through Ruthven, and were making good time, but just as we left Ruthven the infernal reverse gear got balky and this time locked the





**A**s children watch from behind, G. B. Hippee and his wife, Mildred ("Minnie"), pose in their Franklin auto at Spirit Lake.

yelled at me not to do it, that we were going too fast, but it was all done so quickly that I had the machine thrown into a slow speed before I heard him. He said, "You

a blacksmith shop owned by a man named Jack Stewart. He was one of the most accommodating and obliging men that I have ever met, for a stranger. This was 3:30

**We were close to a blacksmith shop owned by a man named Jack Stewart. He was one of the most accommodating and obliging men that I have ever met, for a stranger.**

will strip your gears," and that is what I did. When we got to the foot of the hill, we could not start the machine. Something was broken in the gears. We were close to

o'clock. The only thing to do was to take off the front of the machine and examine the gears and see what the trouble was, so we went to work on it. He was helping us

in the meantime, giving us the use of his tools, and, in fact, doing part of the work. We got off the gear shield and found we had broken a tooth out of one of the gears, filed it off nice and clean, took out the broken pieces and supposed it would run after we had put it together again. We got it together and it was then just about eight o'clock. I tried the machine, but found still a grating noise in it. We pushed the machine in the blacksmith shop for all night and went to the hotel.

#### *Tuesday*

Next morning we went to the machine and looked it over. As



Herndon had to start back for school Wednesday night, and this was Tuesday morning, I was afraid to take the machine apart again, as it might bring him into Des Moines too late. I concluded the best thing to do was to load the machine on a [railroad] car and ship it to Des Moines and take the train and come home. So we loaded the machine on a Chicago, Great Western car and had it shipped. The man Stewart got two other men and a team, got planks and cribbing, loaded the machine into a box car and handled it as though he had had experience before, which he said he had in handling traction engines, and he certainly has, as he was an artist in twisting and turning and knowing how [to] get things through small places. He was just twenty-five minutes in putting the machine into a car, blocking wheels and getting the car closed. This is re-

out of the gears on my machine. They both invited me to be sure and come back and arrange my trip to stay over night with them. In fact nobody could have been nicer to me and tried to do more than these two men did, and as soon as I get my machine back and get it fixed up, I am going to Fort Dodge one day and back the next.

With all the hard luck and breaking of the machine the last day, I would not have missed taking this trip for anything. I felt better for being out in the air. It was more recreation than any vacation I have ever taken. I never was tired a moment in handling the machine over the roads. The only thing that made me tired was the mud. Probably if I had not sworn so much, I would not have been so tired. I would swear awhile and then Herndon would swear awhile, but we were both

was not capable of standing, but this machine stood it and never stuck once. We never had a particle of trouble from overheating.

Herndon is one of the best mechanics for a boy I ever saw. He knows how to fix things, and knows just how to get at it. What he and I don't know about the inside of a Franklin machine, I don't believe is worth knowing. Herndon enjoys every minute of his time he is driving over the road. He ran the car quite a good deal himself, but when he is not driving the machine, he is looking around over the country, and is perfectly happy, just so the wheels are moving under him. The last day just before we got into Fort Dodge, he said, "I would rather ride than do anything else. I would just like to ride over the country and look at it."

The northern Iowa country is the greatest place for women to drive I ever saw. The men must be all at work and the women and children driving. We were very careful of every team we met, stopping the auto still on the side of the road, and Herndon going ahead and leading the horses, if necessary, past the auto. In the entire trip we never had an unpleasant or uncivil word from anyone. We tried to respect their rights and not scare their horses and they showed they appreciated it. ♦

**Probably if I had not sworn so much, I would not have been so tired. I would swear awhile and then Herndon would swear awhile, but we were both justified in it.**

markably fast time and what is better, for all this work done, with what he helped us the night before, the expense of himself and the two men he employed in handling planks and blocking, he only charged me \$5.25. After loading the machine he took me around and introduced me to the banker, the man who runs a little bank at this town, and several other people there, and I made some very nice acquaintances. I told him I was going to get my machine fixed, was coming back, and was going down that long hill into Lehigh if it took every cog

justified in it, as we both said after we got home, we had all the hard luck that was possible to store up in one trip, but what we don't know about running automobiles through mud, and about the capabilities of the Franklin car, is not worth knowing. We gave it a better test and a more severe test I believe on low speed than the car has ever had, because we ran it almost two days on the slow speed, which is very severe on engines and heats them up to a very intense heat, and it is a test that owners of water-cooled machines all claimed an air-cooled machine

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*The author of this travel account, George Benton ("G.B.") Hippee was a Des Moines business leader, involved in the Des Moines Bank, the Des Moines Street Railway Company, and the Iowa Loan & Trust Company. He died in 1930. His son Herndon Hippee, who accompanied him on the auto trip to Spirit Lake, became a lawyer and practiced in Des Moines.*



# PIECEWORK



**B**urlington quilter Mildred Ross points to the green print fabric she used in her first sewing project, when she was 12—a dress made for her mother. Scraps ended up in a Tumbling Blocks quilt, one of many quilts Ross has made over the years.

BY MILLIE FRESE

**F**abric scraps and feed sacks led me to Mildred Ross's doorstep on a sunny November morning nearly a year ago.

At a rummage sale held in conjunction with a Burlington quilt show, I had purchased two plastic bags stuffed with soft cotton remnants from feed sacks. I planned to use them to make a period quilt from authentic fabric. Since the 19th century, women had recycled the white fabric from feed, flour, and sugar sacks into their own sewing projects. (At the 1914 Iowa State Fair, in fact, a contest for making items out of Occident Flour sacks resulted in 1,200 entries—from children's rompers and pajamas, to card table covers and dresser scarves.) Once the company name and logo was bleached out, the soft cotton fabric was often dyed and then cut and sewn into clothing, quilts, sunbonnets, pillowcases, tablecloths, and dozens of other items. Well aware of women's need and desire

for bright fabrics, manufacturers sometime around 1925 started selling their flour, sugar, tobacco, and feed in patterned sacks, with company names and logos printed on adhesive labels that could easily be pulled off. Sizes varied; the largest sacks were about 36" x 44" after they were split open. Because the scraps I had bought were brightly patterned, I knew they probably dated to sometime after 1925 and therefore I could select a quilt pattern from the same era.

Heaped on my dining room table, the mound of sacking scraps represented stories begging to be told. Among the dozens of bright prints was a design of yellow and red baby shoes on a white background. The piece had been used for a child's garment. Ironing it flat, I traced the line in the sack where the armholes, shoulder seams, and neckline had been cut out. The child who wore the outfit would be an adult now. Sewing clothes from recycled fabric during economic




ALL IMAGES PHOTOGRAPHED AND LOANED BY MILLIE FRESE



**R**oss hand-pieced this quilt from feed sacks and cutting scraps, as she minded her parents' hatchery in 1958. Called Tumbling Blocks, the quilt pattern creates the illusion of cubes when seen from one angle, or six-pointed stars from another angle.





depression or world war, did the maker dream while she worked that the child would grow up to know better times?

Unfolding a burgundy fabric scattered with pink and white flowers, I discovered a sleeve piece for an adult-sized blouse or dress. Perhaps the seamstress had cut this piece incorrectly, or maybe it was for a garment she never finished. A couple of the sacks were still uncut. Perforations remained along the edges, indicating where the sacks had been chain-stitched shut. Some of the pieces were too small to use for even the tiniest quilt piece. But they hadn't been too small for someone to save.

As I cut pieces for my own quilt from the feed sack scraps I had bought at the rummage sale, it was obvious that my quilt would be sewn from pieces of another woman's life.

Curious about who had given the scraps to the rummage sale, I soon tracked down the donor. Mildred Ross lives on the southeast side of Burlington, in a two-story yellow house with an inviting front porch. I paid her a call.

"My parents had a hatchery in Burlington," Ross explained when I asked how she had acquired the feed sacks. She worked in the hatchery until she married Tom Ross in 1941. After her marriage she still kept the books for her parents' business.

"Mom saved all the feed sacks from the store and from our farm," Ross explained. There were seven cartons of uncut feed sacks—washed, pressed, and ready for use—among her mother's possessions when she moved to a nursing home. "I sold lots of them to go towards her keep," Ross said. "I still have 85 upstairs. Don't ask me why I kept them."

Born in 1917, Ross taught herself how to sew when she was eleven. Sewing was a necessity when she was young, she explained, but it was also something she loved to do.

When she was 12, she made all the clothes for herself and her mother and sister for a trip to Colorado. Her mother and grandmother both quilted, and she recalls many quiet nights growing up, listening to the radio "of an evening" and doing handwork.

One of the first things she constructed was a green print dress for her mother. "I laid one of her old dresses on top of the fabric and cut around it for a pattern." Her mother wore the dress until, as Ross says, "there was nothing left of it."

**N**othing, that is, except for the cutting scraps Ross saved for piecing quilts. "I still have a piece of the fabric in one of my quilts," she said. She unfolded a Tumbling Blocks quilt and caressed away the wrinkles. As her fingers paused over diamond pieces, more stories surfaced.

"My daughter Mary wore a skirt made out of this on her first day of school," Ross said, pointing to a bright yellow fabric with red cherries. "This was a piece of one of my daughter Carol's dresses. And here's a piece of the green print from Mother's dress," she continued. "There are feed sack pieces in here, too. I could go on and on."

Ross pieced the Tumbling Blocks quilt in 1958 from scraps she had saved over the years. Her father had fallen ill, and once again she was called upon to mind the Rieke hatchery. Her intertwining roles as daughter, wife, and mother are stitched into the tumbling blocks. Her daughter Carol traced with pencil around a cardboard diamond pattern (with sandpaper glued to one side so the pattern wouldn't slip on the fabric), then cut out pieces one by one (with scissors, Ross pointed out, in contrast to the quick-cutting rotary blades that quilters





use today). Ross sewed the pieces together by hand when business was slow at the hatchery. The mosaics of diamonds create the illusion of three-dimensional cubes. But from another angle, the cubes disappear and eight-point stars emerge. "Even though you look at it a long time, there's still something new to see," Ross said.

Her first bed quilt was an appliquéd Sunbonnet Sue made when she was 16. "Of course, it's much loved," she said of her first quilt—a euphemism for worn, faded, showing signs of age. There are baby quilts and bedspreads made for her own children. Like her sunbonnet quilt, they too are much loved.

In telling the stories of weddings, births, deaths, and quiet evenings at home, Ross's quilts become metaphors for life. Sometimes the pieces don't fit together exactly right, or the fabric isn't what you'd choose—it's what you have on hand.

"To me, scrap quilts are more fun to make," she said. "It's a challenge to put them together and coordinate colors you might not put together anywhere else, but it works in the quilt. And I'm 'Scotch,'" she adds with a smile. "If I've got all that fabric I've saved, I don't want to go buy more." Except, she conceded, when she needed some purple for a quilt. "If I need purple and never sewed with purple, I'll buy maybe a quarter of a yard."

The artist in her emerges as she takes the scraps she has on hand and turns them into what she wants them to be. "Quilting is an art form, but it used to be a necessity. My mother

and grandma quilted because they needed the covers. I don't think they thought of quilts as art. When a quilt got old they put it between the coil springs and the mattress so the springs wouldn't rub holes in the mattress. I'd never do that with one of my quilts."

For Ross, sewing was a necessity as she made clothes for her family. She made baby quilts, clothing, tablecloths, sheets, pajamas,

dish towels, aprons — "all the things you need fabric for to make a home"—from feed sacks during the war because Americans couldn't buy new fabric. "They fade if the sun hits them or they're washed much," Ross said. "Feed sacks are strong—but we were real glad when you could buy fabric at the store again."

Later, sewing became a source of income as she sewed for

others. "Young women would come to me with a box of fabric for a wedding," she recalled. "Three months later I could see all that beauty going down the aisle and know that I created it."

**R**oss is precise—she can recall exactly how much she paid for quilting needles (she prefers platinum plated), or for an English thimble to replace the one she'd worn a hole through from quilting. She knows the price of a spool of quilting thread and can tell you how many spools (and the equivalent yardage)



**The first quilt Mildred Ross made was a Sunbonnet Sue pattern (detail above). The border on this page and the next are feed sack scraps that Ross had saved.**





went into the whitework quilt she recently completed. She remembers that it took one large feed sack to make a full apron, two to make pajama pants ("They made pretty pajamas that were so soft," Ross said), and three for an adult-sized dress. She split feed sacks in half to make dish towels (which she still uses), and sewed two feed sacks together to make picnic table cloths. One feed sack made a pillowcase, and if you could get two alike you'd have a matching pair for a double bed. Ross still uses ironing board covers made from recycled feed sacks. "Cut them cattywampus [on the bias] so they stretch better," she explained, "then sew elastic around the edge."

**Q**uilting is an art Ross uses, lives with, lives through. She doesn't handle her quilts with white cotton gloves or store them in acid-free boxes. She uses them, loves them, washes them in her washing machine, hangs them on the clothesline to dry, and gives them away, though sometimes it's hard to let them go. So much time and so much of the maker are invested in the work.

Some quilts, stored in pillowcases in her closet (never store them in plastic, she warns),

are tagged with slips of paper on which she has written the names of relatives who will receive them. One quilt is for a granddaughter's wedding. "The girl is 13—I don't know if I'll still be around when she gets married, but I want her to have some of my work," Ross said.

Others will be presented as gifts when the time is right.


Ross's quilts mark milestones in the life of her family. Her sewing embodies beauty and memories, the pleasure of joyous times, the process of working through difficult and sometimes painful times. Next to her family photo albums sits an album filled with carefully labeled photographs of all the quilts she's made and of family quilts she's restored. "This is Johnny's quilt," she said of the first photograph in her quilt album. "Johnny stayed with us since he was one month old while his mom taught school. He was especially close to Tom."

Johnny's Shoo Fly quilt was made in 1986 from scraps of his grandfather's shirts and pajamas. "Tom was sick for 26 months with cancer and couldn't talk the last 18 months of his life. Making that quilt together was a healing process for Johnny and I." Johnny, who was eight years old when his grandfather died, attended the elementary school near her home. "He'd come



**Ross patiently quilts a top appliquéd in the 1920s.**





here for lunch and lay out blocks on the floor before he'd go back to school. I'd sew them together in the afternoon.

"Januarys—because that's when my husband died—are still 'blah' months for me. So I usually piece a quilt in January and February, then lay it aside until the notion strikes me and I want to quilt."

**W**hen I visited her, she was quilting a top given to her in the 1960s. "I got it out every once in a while, then put it back. Now the time is right and I'm finishing it." It's an appliqué pattern of flowers and butterflies with embroidered details. Like most handmade quilts, it quietly whispers stories of its maker. Ross explained that it was appliquéd in the 1920s by a Burlington woman who died in 1932. It was given to the woman's daughter—Ross's neighbor—who hemmed the edges and used it as a bedspread, but never quilted it.

Ross received the quilt top when her neighbor died in 1965. "Daisy Paschal was my neighbor across the alley, and she was an army nurse during World War I. I think a lot about her now as I work on this quilt," Ross said. She points out the tiny, even appliqué stitches, evidence that the maker was experienced in her art. "I admire appliqué, but I don't like to do it!"

She added a border to the quilt top, using fabric from her own mother's scrap bag. "It's from the 1920s, too," she said of the lavender fabric that blends perfectly with the flowers and butterflies. There are a few tiny blood spots on the quilt top, probably from a needle pricking the maker's finger decades ago.

"Seventy-year-old blood spots are difficult to remove," Ross laughed. "I've tried peroxide and everything else I can think of. Maybe I'll

embroider lazy daisies over the spots. Or maybe I'll just let them be."

The lives and work of women mingle across generations in the fabric, work, and art of a quilt. On Ross's beds, in her closets and cedar chests, are quilts with the thread of history running through them, showcasing beauty and skill that have transformed fragments, scraps, and rags into a storehouse of memories.

As Ross says: "You've seen the story of my life."

**N**ow I add my own stories, my own memories, to Ross's feed sack scraps as I appliqué wreaths of flowers on the quilt I am making. Feed sacks were before my time, but to me they represent conversations with my grandfather about living through difficult times. I asked him once (while I was contemplating choices for my future) why he chose to become a truck driver. His reply: "During the depression you took whatever job you could get and you were damn thankful."

Sometimes 'making do' transforms life's scraps into a memorable life. Sometimes making do transcends life and becomes art. ❖

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*The author, Millie Frese, is the editor of The Goldfinch (Iowa's history magazine for children, published by the State Historical Society of Iowa) and an avid quilter.*





# Heartland Comfort

Bedcoverings from the collections  
of the State Historical Society of Iowa

by Michael O. Smith



SHSI (IOWA CITY): YOUNG COLLECTION

Women and young children surround a quilting frame in a Lutheran church parlor in North Liberty, Iowa.



**M**ore than 90 years ago, the State Historical Society of Iowa began to collect quilts and coverlets as symbols of the pioneers who settled Iowa. Our museum now houses more than 300 examples of bedcoverings, including quilts, coverlets, comforters, and counterpanes. Many of these were made in Iowa; others were brought by settlers after Iowa Territory was created in 1838.

Today we recognize that quilts especially have great visual power. In fact, many contemporary quilt makers conceive of their work with gallery display in mind. No longer collected only as symbols of our pioneer ancestors, bedcoverings are now collected for the stories they tell about our past, and as examples of Iowa's artistic and aesthetic heritage.

The bedcoverings showcased on the following pages appear in the Society's new museum exhibit, "Heartland Comfort." Of course, such exhibitions are artificial by nature. Few, if any, of the early quilt makers or weavers meant their work to be treated as fragile artifacts that must be protected from touch and harsh light. It is good to visualize how the makers of these bedcoverings would have used them—spread carefully over beds, laid out for picnics, draped over a parlor couch, wrapped around sick children, or put away in chests and drawers for special occasions.



# Pieced Quilts

A quilt is a “sandwich” of cloth consisting of a top layer, usually patterned and usually cotton; a middle layer of some form of batting; and a backing, usually a plain fabric. All three layers are held together by plain or decorative

stitching called quilting. Piecing is the basic method of quilt construction and consists of sewing cutout pieces of fabric together to create a patterned whole. Pieced quilts are often referred to as patchwork.



Jean Smith Grey, of Pelham, Massachusetts, made this Nine-Patch variation pieced quilt of cotton (with a linen backing) probably in the 1780s. Its simple printed cottons and wide borders are typical of the pieced or “patchwork” quilts that became popular in New England in the late 18th century.





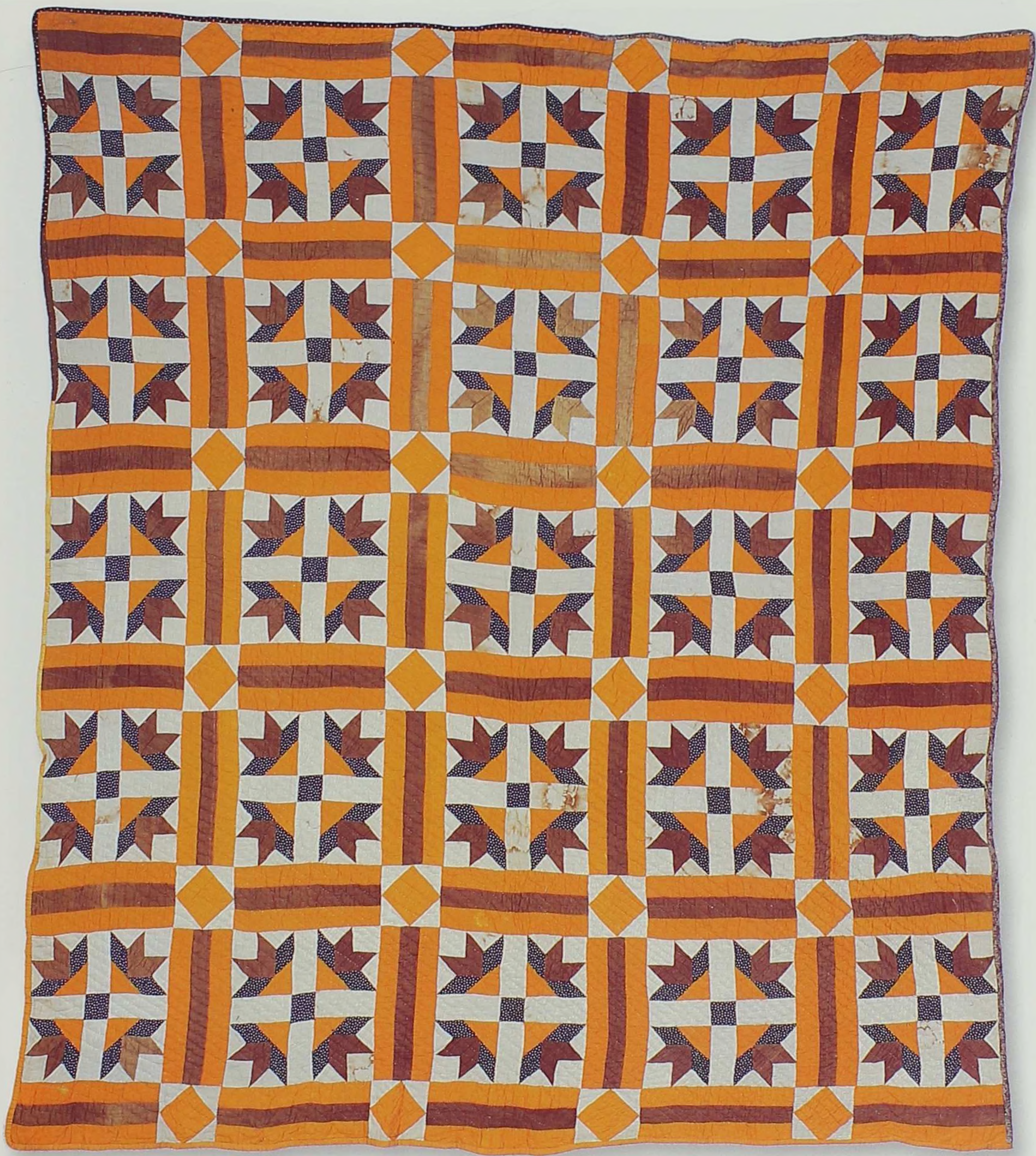
This Framed Medallion quilt was pieced by a Mrs. Hines, of Cottenham, England, in 1855. The glazed cotton chintz fabrics used are roller-printed dress and furniture fabrics from 1830 to 1855. Note that the center frame is square with the edges of the quilt. American Medallion quilts from the late 18th and early 19th centuries are similar but often have the center set on point in a diamond shape.





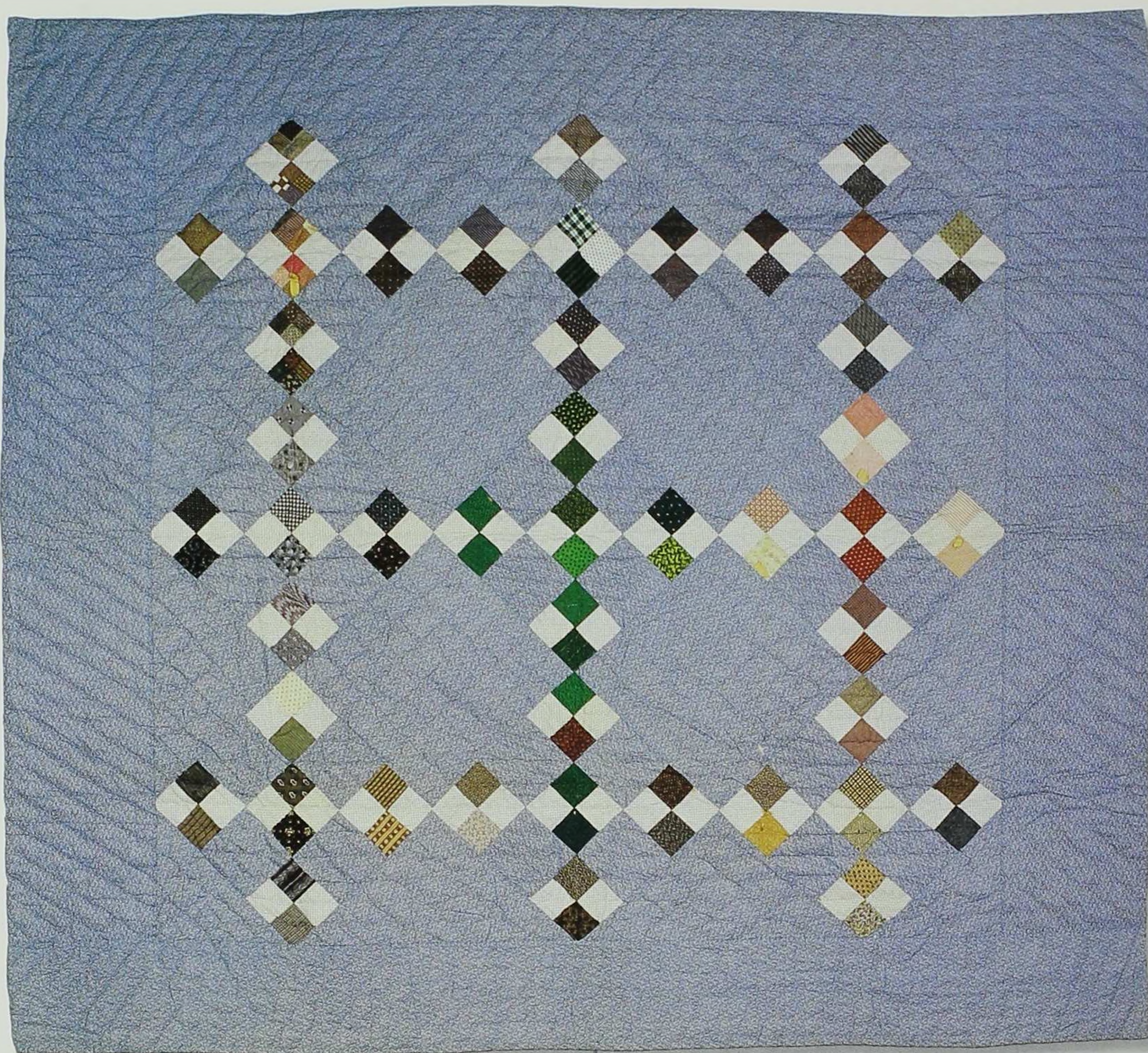
Lola Work made this Irish Chain pieced quilt during the Civil War in remembrance of her son who served in the Union Army. The blue material is wool from his uniform. Work and her husband, David, raised six children on a farm near Calhoun in Harrison County, Iowa. She died in 1907.





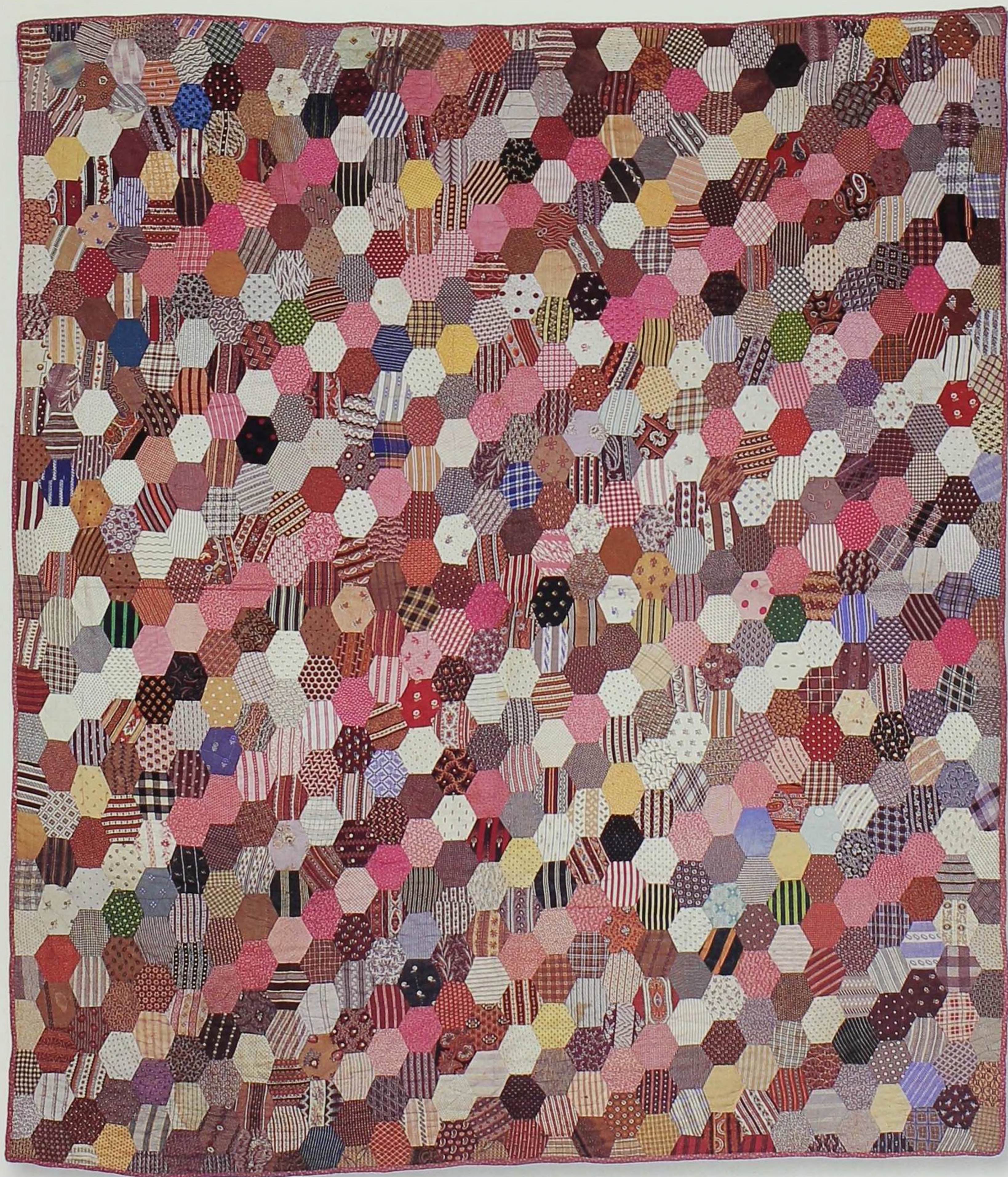
This Bear Paw pieced quilt was one of the few possessions of Epharim and Eliza Cason, two freed slaves who accompanied Union soldiers north to Iowa after the Civil War. Both had been house slaves, and their former owner, a Mrs. Gee of Howard County, Missouri, gave them the quilt. The bright colors of the quilt indicate that it was kept "for good" and never used.





Lydia Evans Mather (1808-1885) pieced this Irish Chain quilt for one of her children sometime after 1860; her daughter-in-law Ellen quilted it in the late 1870s. Lydia Mather was a Quaker who moved from Ohio to Cedar County, Iowa, in 1851. The subdued colors and extensive use of gray are typical of Quaker designs.





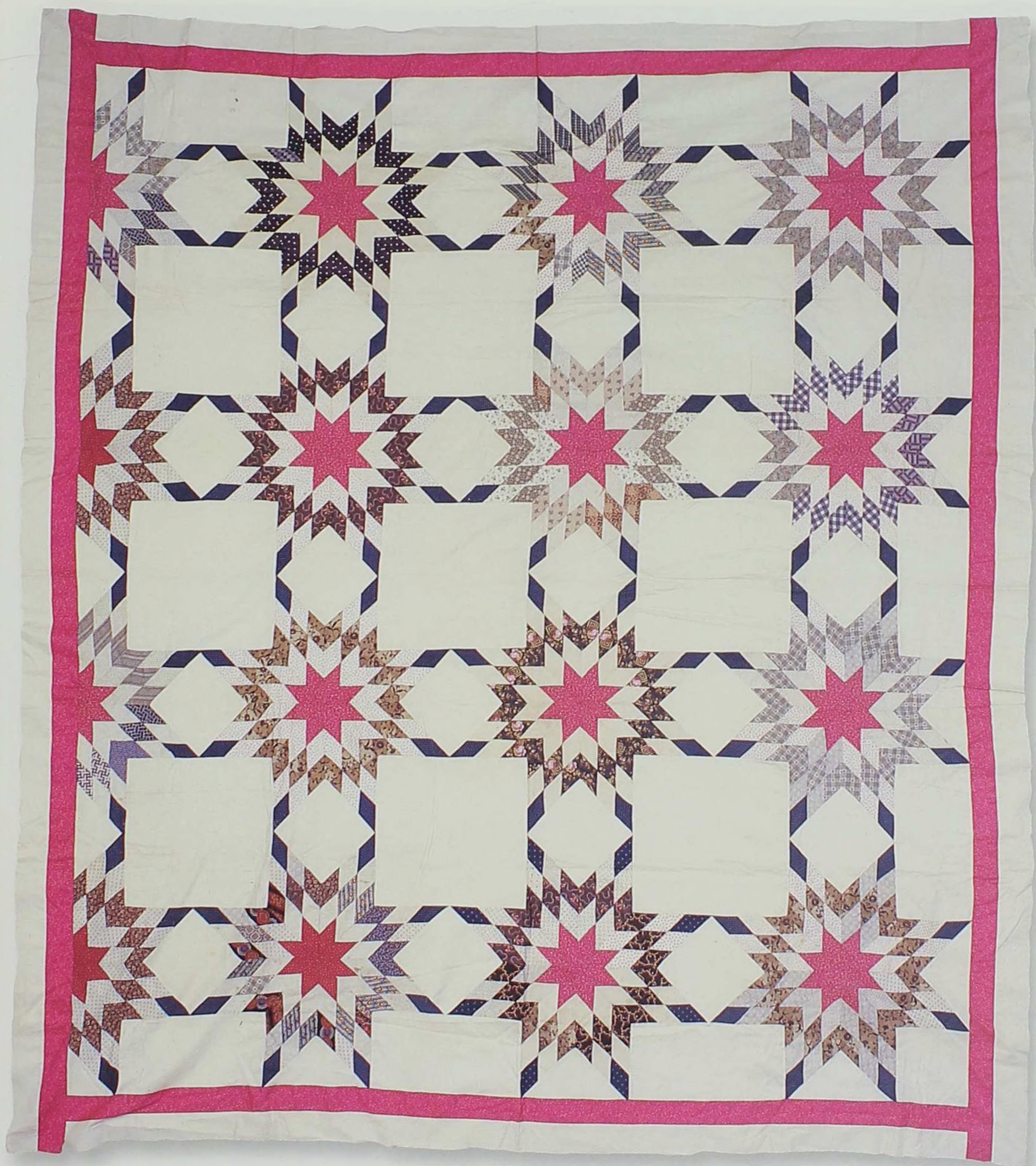
Mrs. W. W. Conklin, of New York, made this Mosaic pieced quilt sometime between 1850 and 1865. One-patch patterns like this one required particular precision. If one measurement, cut, or hem was incorrect, the cumulative error would not allow all the pieces to fit together. In piecing Mosaics, quilters often first basted each piece of fabric over a paper mosaic template, then sewed the fabric mosaics together, and sometimes (but not always) removed the paper.





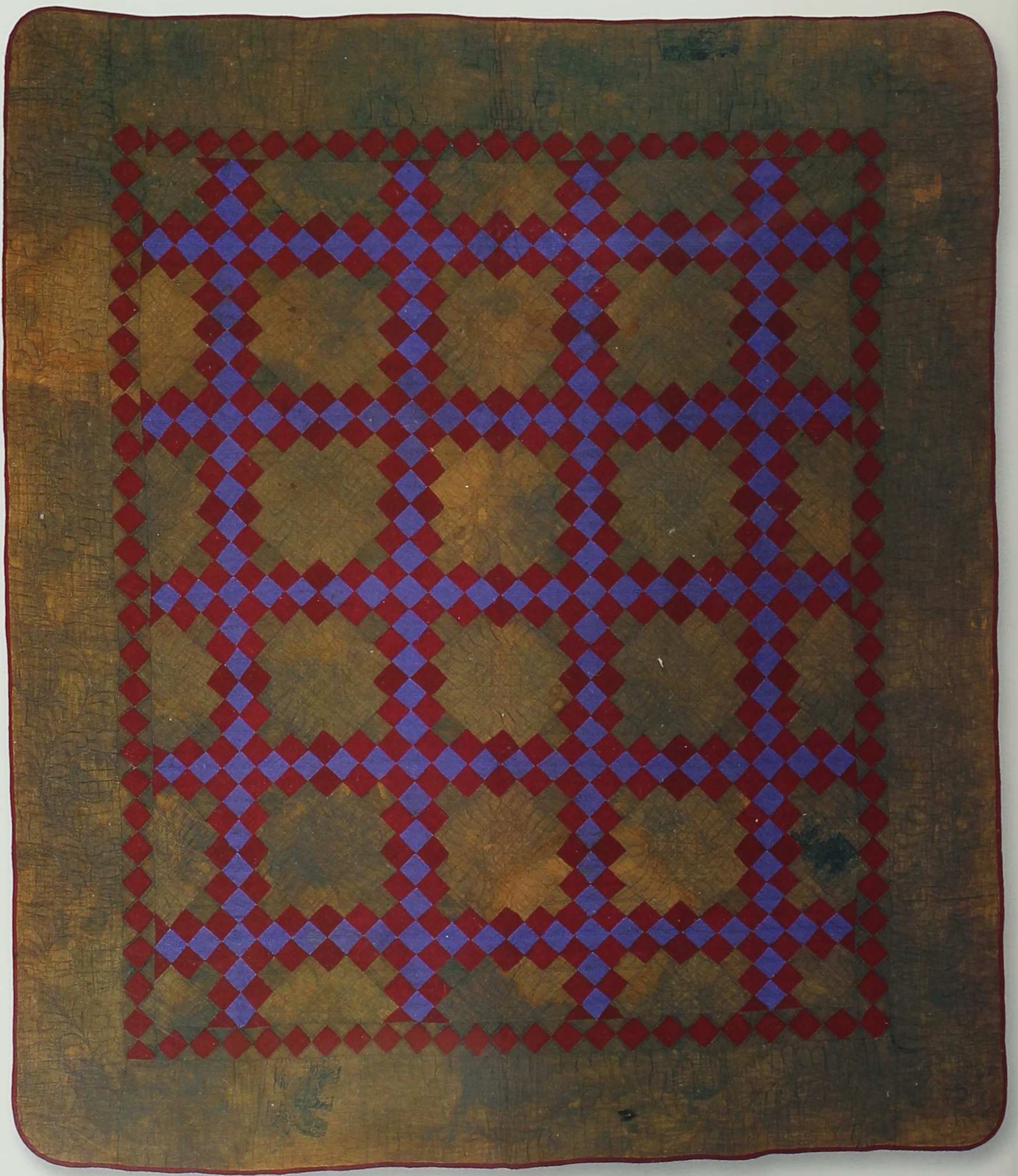
This Around the World pieced quilt top represents three generations of the Harlan family—Mary “Ruby” Harlan, Mary Harlan Dow, and Pearl Dow Monis, of Stockport, Iowa. The procedure for piecing small hexagons was first published in the 1850s. By the last quarter of the 19th century, quilts made up of many small pieces were quite popular. (This quilt, with paper templates still intact, was probably made in that period.) In some cases, contests were held to see who could make a quilt from the most pieces. The actual number of pieces in this quilt has never been determined.





Very little is known about this quilt top, a variation of the Star pattern. It may have been made in Iowa, in the last two decades of the 19th century.





This Double Irish Chain pieced quilt carries the date "1885" and the initials "GP," for Gid Petersheim. Acquired near Kalona, Iowa, it may be of Mennonite origin.





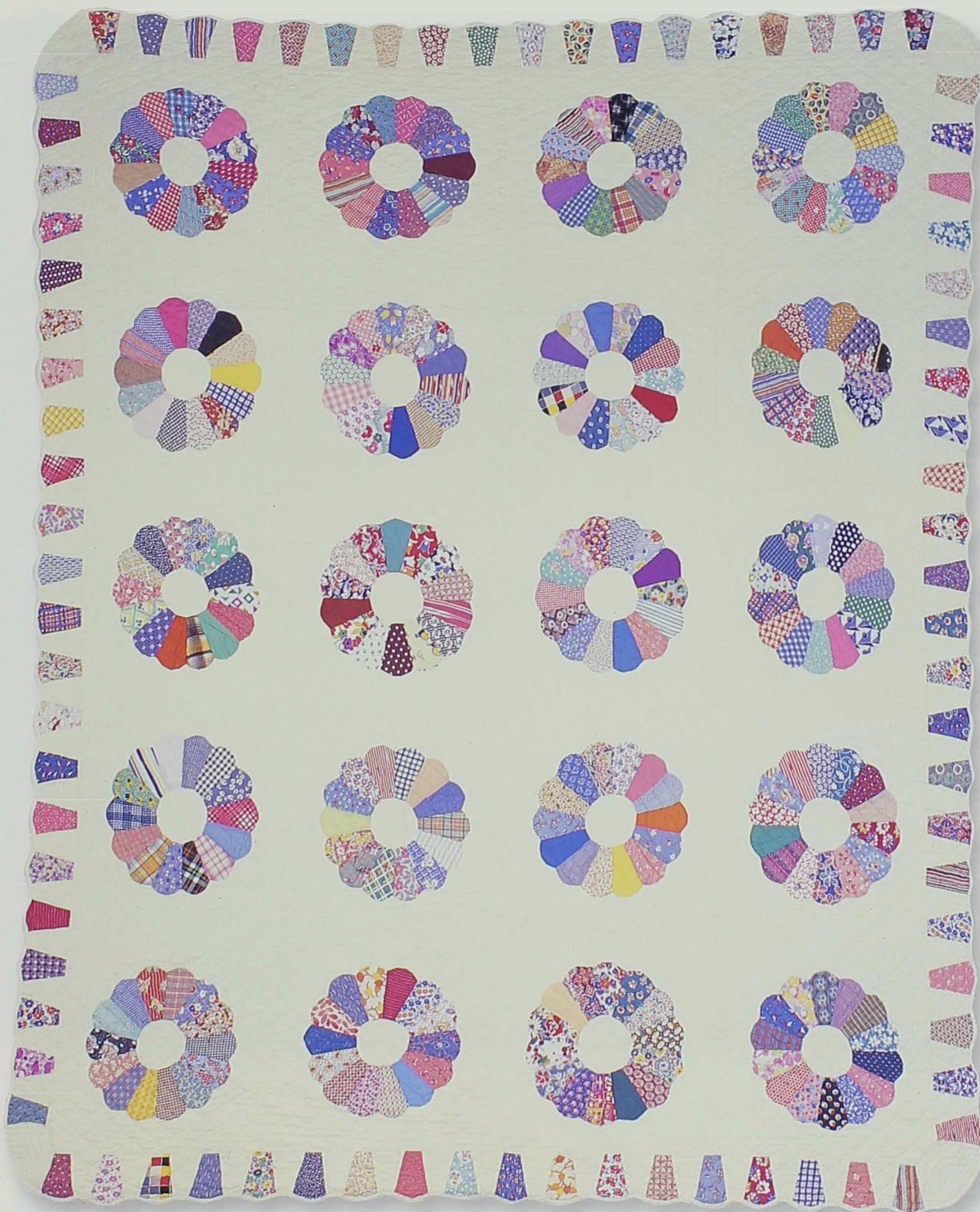
Emily Fenner Bomhoff pieced this "Uncle Sam's Silk Bedcover" during her first pregnancy in 1899, when she was about 30. It shows her love for her adopted country (she had immigrated to Iowa when she was six). She married Fredrick Bomhoff in 1897. He was a tinsmith in Jesup, Iowa, and she was a professional seamstress in nearby Independence. Fredrick drew the bed-sized map of the United States (including both Indian Territory and Oklahoma Territory), and Emily used silk scraps from her customers' dresses for the states.





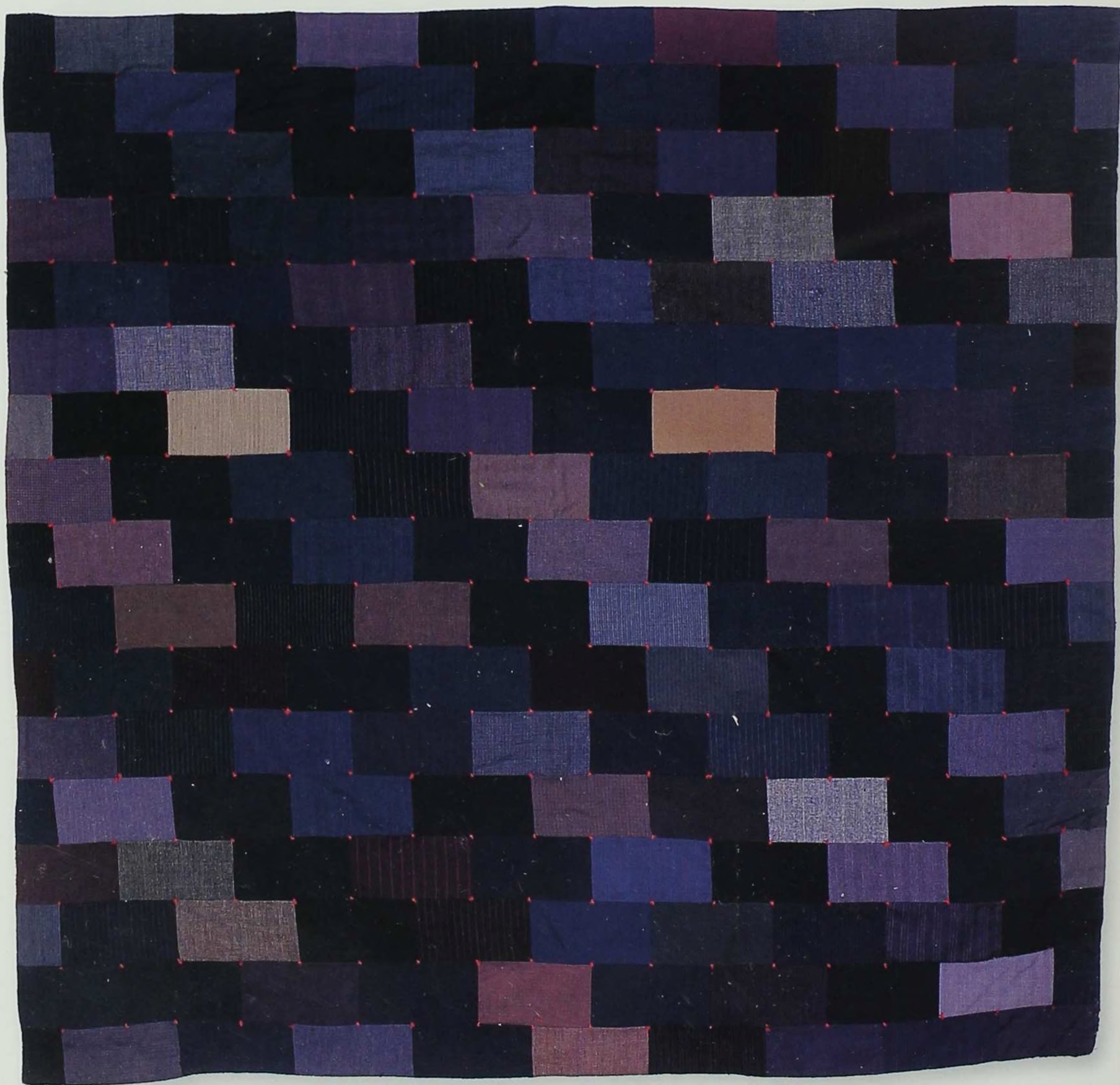
This Tumbling Blocks pattern and other “fool the eye” designs were popular at the turn of the century. This is actually a comforter rather than a quilt, because the batting is secured by yarn ties rather than by quilting stitches. Its maker is unknown. Patterns like this one, depicting children’s toy blocks, were often used for children’s quilts.





Flora Maria Spillman Rivers (1865-1944) used dress fabrics for piecing this Dresden Plate quilt in the 1930s in Poweshiek County, Iowa. The Dresden Plate pattern was popular from the 1920s through the 1950s.





Arthur Draheim, a tailor in Clarion, Iowa, made this Brick pieced quilt, or “comfort,” from outdated wool suit samples that he received from manufacturers—just as many women who made and sold shirts from their homes often used the shirting samples for quilts. This bedcovering was likely made between 1910 and 1940. Draheim died in 1942.





All that is known about this Flower Garden pieced quilt is that it was made by a member of the Brainard family of Adair, Iowa, probably between 1930 and 1950. No two embroidered flower designs are the same.





Ada Jane Shelton Rogers (1895-1988) of Williamsburg, Iowa, was a prolific quilter who made quilts for most of her family. This one was for her grandson in 1964 and is completely hand-pieced and hand-quilted. Although it uses a traditional pattern—Grandmother's Fan—the fabrics are contemporary to the 1960s.





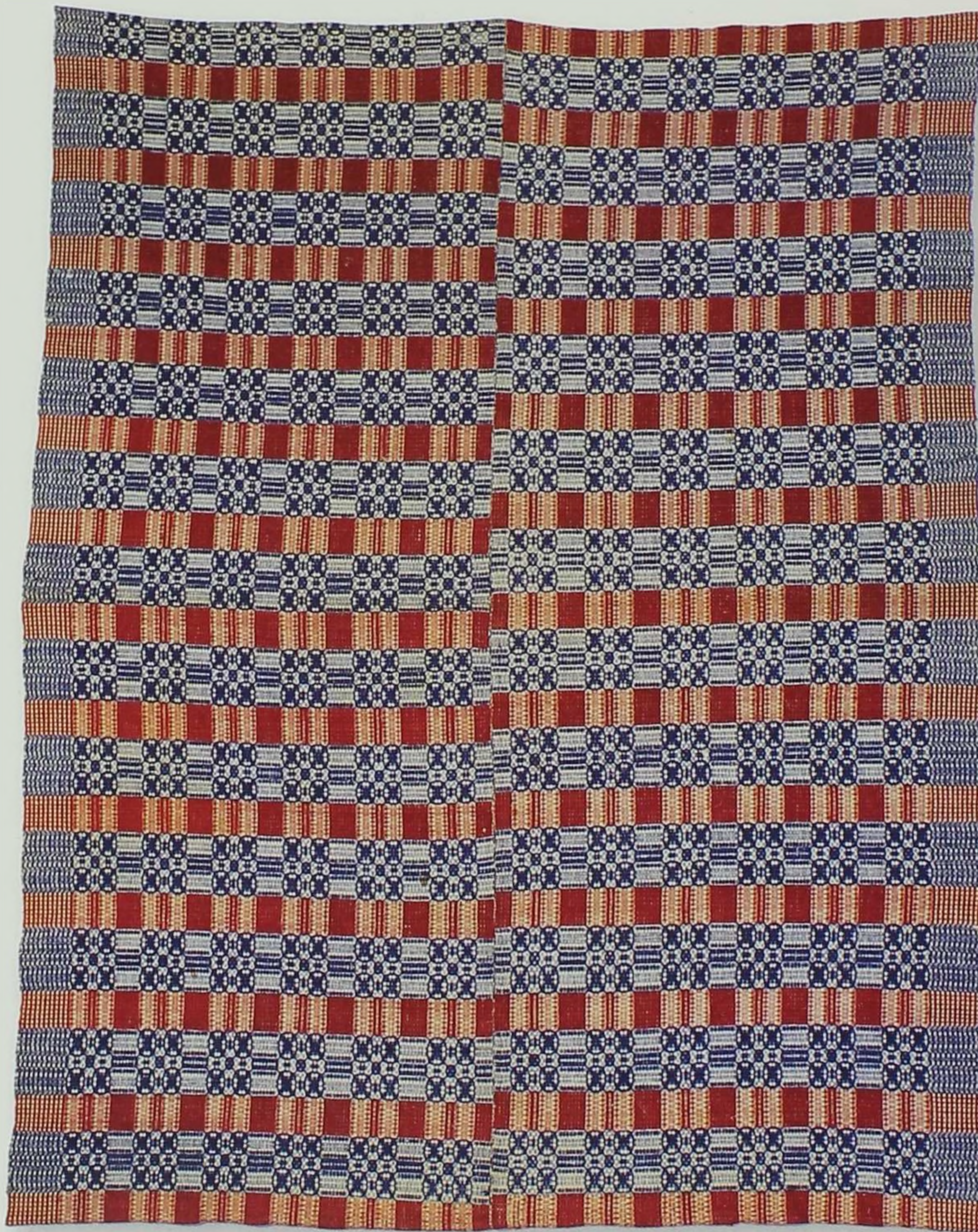
Carrie Dillon, of Creston, Iowa, pieces an Apple Core quilt in October 1947.



# Coverlets

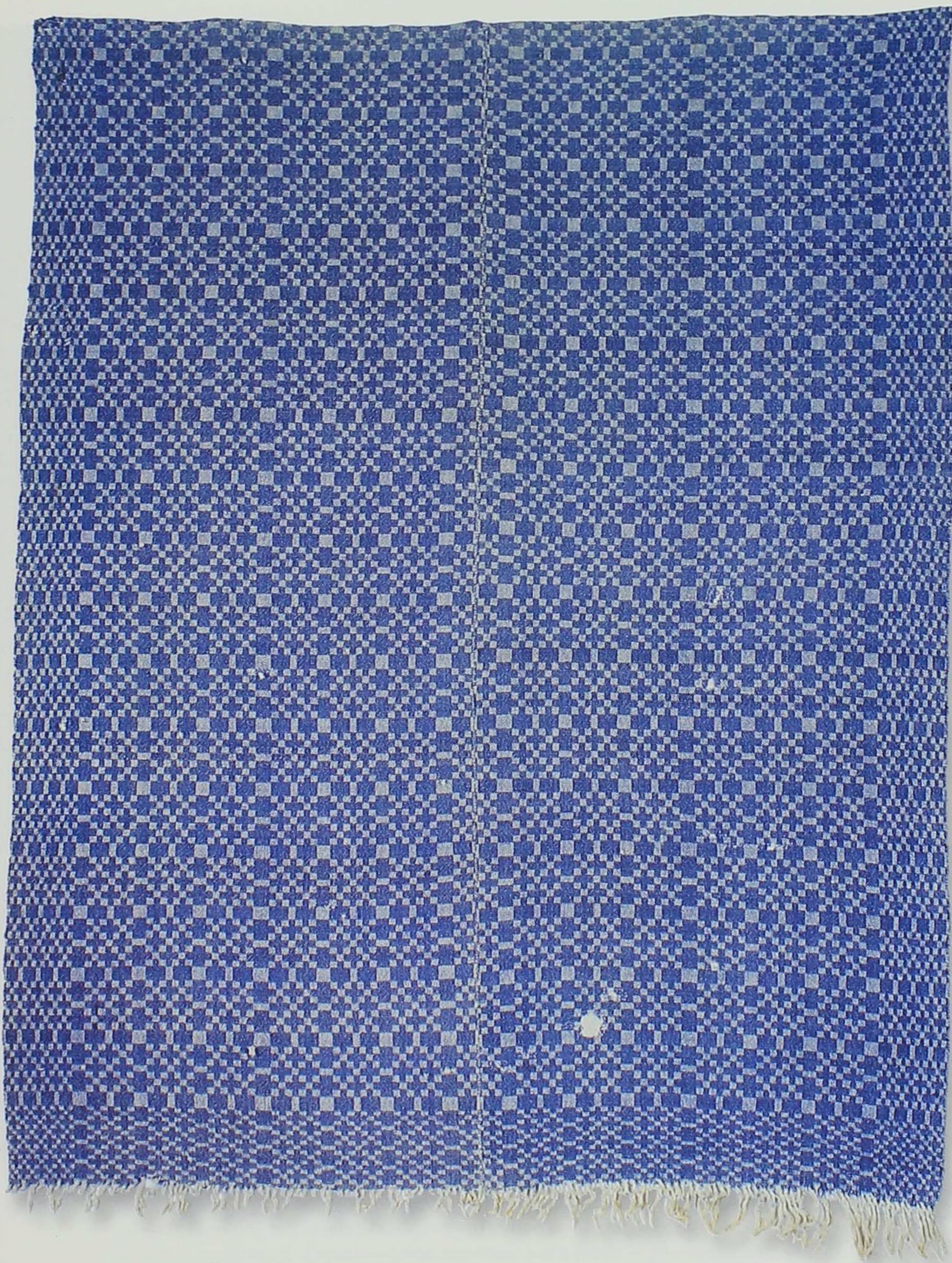
Coverlets are woven bedcoverings. Unlike quilting, which was considered a domestic and social activity for women, weaving was often engaged in by men as a profession (even

though men often wove on looms set up in their homes). By the 1870s, less expensive factory-made blankets and coverlets were replacing hand-loomed coverlets.



This coverlet is woven in indigo blue and red wool and undyed cotton, the three most readily available colors. It illustrates the simplest, earliest, and most common of the coverlet weaving techniques—the overshot technique, often used by non-professional weavers. Overshot coverlets have a compound weave structure of one warp and two wefts. The warp (running vertically) is usually cotton, and the weft (running horizontally) is wool. The term “overshot” refers to the long passes of supplementary wool weft that overshoot the surface of the plain weave foundation. This coverlet could have been made anywhere in the Midwest in the last half of the 19th century. The weaver is unknown.





Lydia Evans Mather wove this coverlet between 1860 and 1880. (She also made the quilt on page 40.) The coverlet consists of two panels sewn together, selvage to selvage. Its pattern is typical of simple home-woven overshoot coverlets.





Sabra Ann Bullock Hinkson (1819-1891) lived in New Hampshire and made this wool coverlet sometime between 1840 and 1870. She chose a simple overshoot pattern and enlivened the piece with a hand-netted and tied fringe, cut out at the lower corners so the piece would drape around the footposts of a bed.





This double weave coverlet features the Snowball pattern with a Double Pine Tree border. The double weave structure is believed to have been introduced in America by Scottish and English immigrants. It has two sets of warp and two sets of weft, resulting in a double fabric, woven in two layers. Usually, one set is cotton and one set is wool. Double-woven coverlets were made in geometric patterns, like this one, and in more elaborate "figured and fancy" patterns. Lucius Manwell, donor of this coverlet, was born in Indiana and moved to Guthrie County in 1870. He was a store owner and merchant. The coverlet was likely made by someone in his family.





Although the weaver of this figured and fancy coverlet is unknown, family tradition says that it was brought to Iowa in 1861 by a member of the Merrow family from South Wales, New York. Particular attributes of the coverlet also point to a New York origin: the double weave construction, the simple red and white coloring, and the absence of fringe. It may have been made in the 1850s. By the 1840s, looms had increased in size so that one-piece construction was possible. The pattern layout is similar to ingrain (flat-woven) carpet patterns of the same period.





The history of this double weave figured and fancy coverlet is uncertain. According to the donor, it was woven "at a mill in New London, Iowa about 1850." However, censuses and other records for Henry County, Iowa, do not refer to any mills or weavers in New London or the rest of the county between 1850 and 1870, the period in which it was most likely woven. The weaver is unidentified.





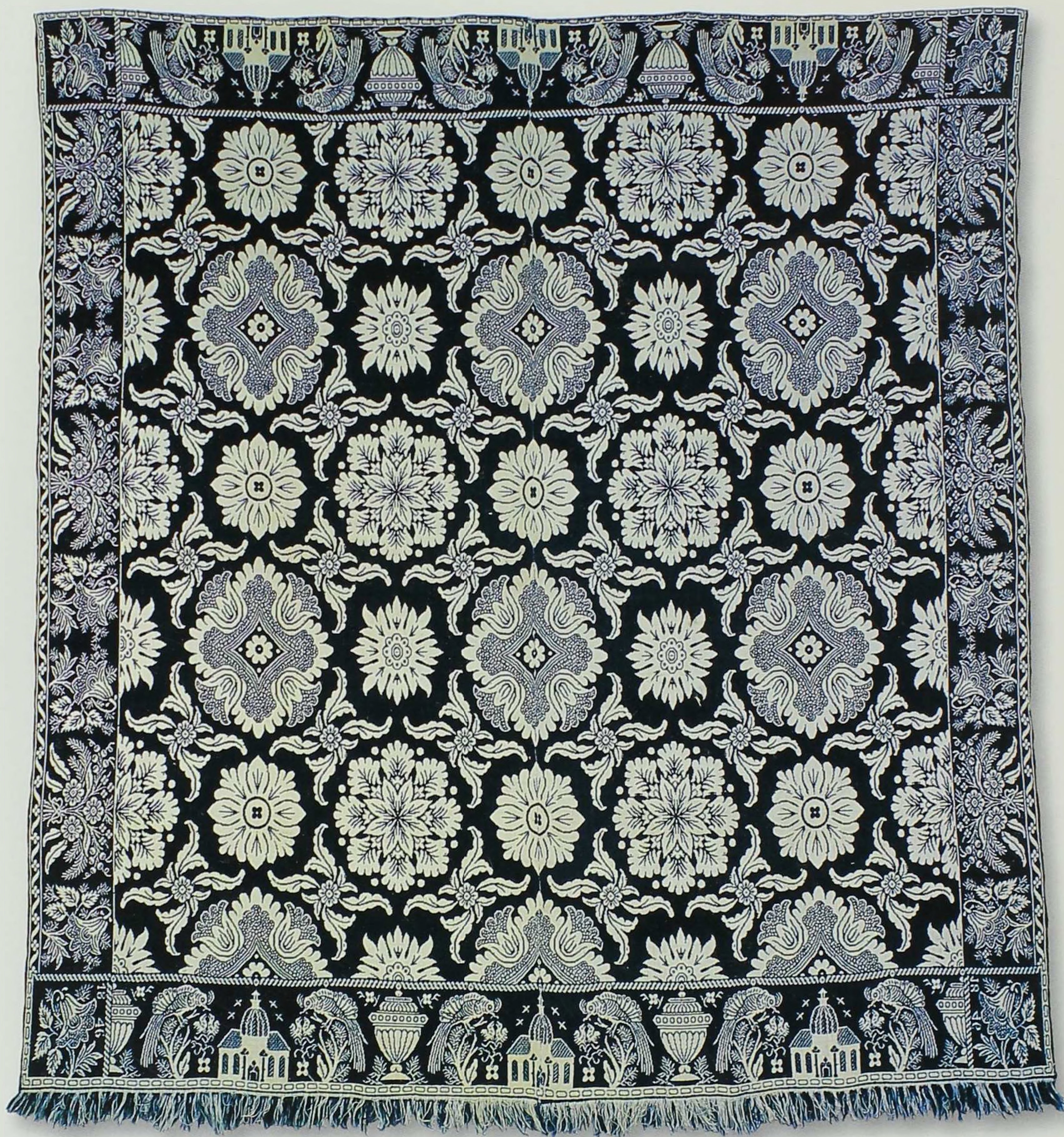
This double weave figured and fancy coverlet (1839) is a primary example of the early work of Harry Tyler (1801-1858). Tyler was born to English parents in Connecticut. He eventually settled in Butterfield, Jefferson County, New York, where he started a weaving business in 1834. He must have been a prolific and popular weaver; more than 268 extant coverlets have been attributed to him. According to Tyler's granddaughter, he designed all of his patterns.





This double weave figured and fancy coverlet (1840) is attributed to G. Stich, a weaver in Newark, Ohio, between 1836 and 1845. The warehouse or factory border is unique, and perhaps illustrates the emerging industrial economy in Newark. The four-inch quilted strip at the top was added in the 20th century.





The lily in the corner of this double weave figured and fancy coverlet (1846) is considered the early trademark of weaver James Craig, and the border pattern is typical of Craig family work. The Craigs were probably the best-known family of coverlet weavers in mid-19th-century Indiana.





In this double weave figured and fancy coverlet, the eagle and "E Pluribus Unum" in the border reflect weaver Isaac N. Whittam's patriotism for his adopted land. Note that he was specific in his corner cartouche, wanting everyone to know his exact location: "in Cedar Rapids Linn County Iowa." Whittam was born in Lancastershire, England, in 1824. At age 16, he immigrated to America and soon joined his father, a weaver, at mills in Philadelphia and New York. In 1848 he moved to Illinois, and in 1850 to Cedar Rapids, where he managed a woolen mill. Most coverlet weavers continued in their chosen trade for much of their lives. Whittam was an exception. He had begun studying law in New York and continued his studies in Cedar Rapids. Admitted to the bar in 1854, he served the rest of his life as a lawyer and became the first mayor of the newly incorporated city of Cedar Rapids in 1856.





This pair off coverlets (see both pages) was woven in the Tied Beiderwand technique by George Heilbronn (1811-1874). The border pattern of birds and flowers is typical of his work and that of his older brother, John Jacob Heilbronn. The brothers came from a family of weavers who emigrated in 1833 from the German-speaking part of Alsace and settled in New York. Later, the brothers moved to Fairfield County, Ohio. After John Jacob's death in 1842, George purchased four of his looms and associated machinery. In Tied Beiderwand, the traditional weave structure for a figured and fancy coverlet, the warp and one weft are usually cotton and the second weft is wool. (Continued on next page.)





Surviving pairs of coverlets are rare. The patterns of this pair are similar but not identical. Ohio weaver George Heilbronn made this pair for Isaac and Harriet [Wisely] Brandt, who were married November 1, 1849, in Lancaster. In the corner cartouches, note the names "I. Brandt" (*opposite page*) and "H. Brandt" (*above*). In May 1850 the Brandts moved to Indiana, and in 1858 to Des Moines, Iowa. Isaac became a prosperous Des Moines landowner. In the 1880s he built a large house called "Cherry Place" across from the state capitol.





Daniel Stephenson wove this coverlet in the Tied Beiderwand 2:1 technique, in Fairfield, Jefferson County, Iowa, in the mid-1850s. In Stephenson's earliest coverlets, his name and "Jefferson County" appeared as an inscription along the outer border. In his later works, like this one, he placed the information in the corner, the more traditional location. The average price of weaving a coverlet was between \$3.50 and \$5.00. To weave the name of the customer and date in the corner was 25 cents extra.

Born in Huddersfield, Yorkshire County, England in 1823, Stephenson came to America with his family in 1840 and settled in Geneva, New York, where his father worked as a weaver. Daniel worked in Canada before moving to Iowa. He wove primarily in reds, greens, and blues, and did much of the dyeing himself. His designs were his own and he is said to have brought his own loom and flying shuttle with him to Iowa in 1852. He continued to weave coverlets until at least 1870. In 1877 he retired to a farm, where he died in 1892.





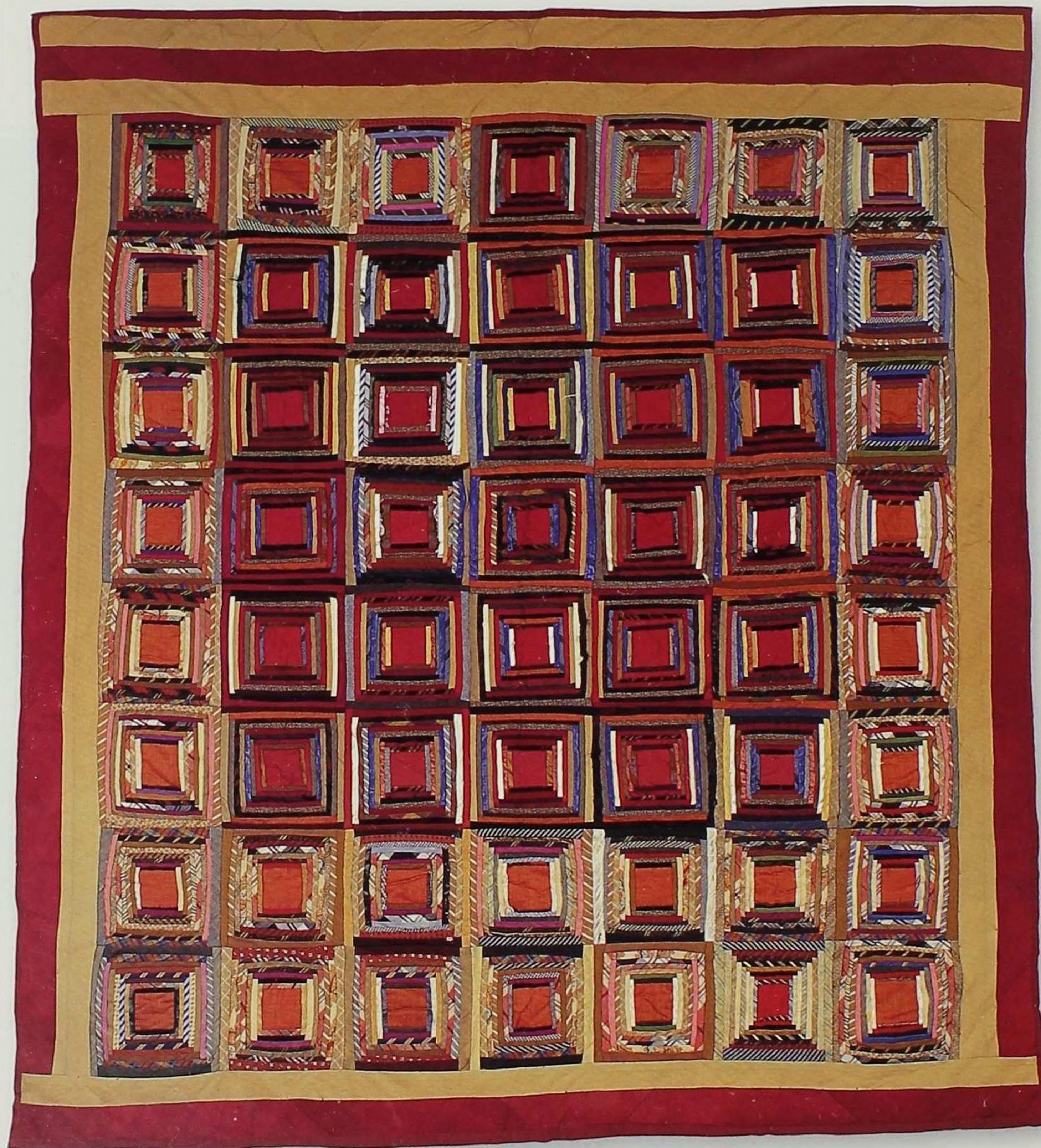
Women in Corning, Iowa, quilt in a county sewing room, through the Work Projects Administration (WPA) in September 1936.



# Log Cabin Quilts

American Log Cabin style quilts were popular in the mid to late 19th century. They are made by placing fabric rectangles or strips (like logs in a cabin) around a central square. Although the Log Cabin style was long thought to be of American origin, new research now points to an

18th-century origin in northern Great Britain or Scotland. One English tradition says the design is based on the straight furrows of a plowed field, and that the red center represents the sun warming the earth.



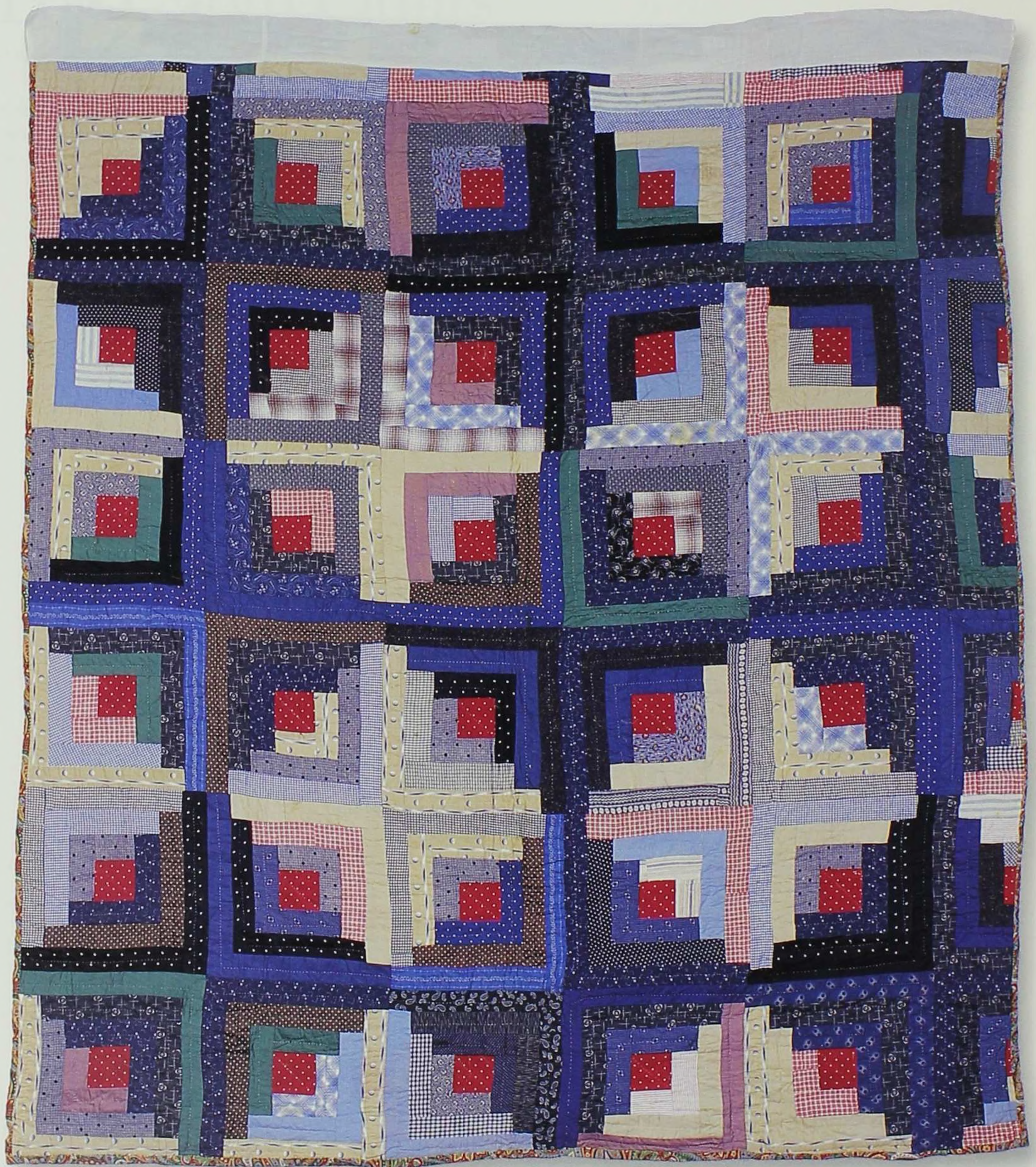
Edith Prizer Griffith, of Brighton, Iowa, made this Courthouse Steps quilt in 1885. It is an excellent example of the American Log Cabin style popular in the mid-19th century. The red center of each square is said to represent the warmth of the family hearth.





Maria McIntyre Carver Dickson Dunn (1828-1899) made this Zig-Zag variation of the Log Cabin pattern. She was born in Indiana and came to Iowa in the 1840s with her family. They settled in Wapello County. The quilt was probably made there, sometime between 1860 and 1880.





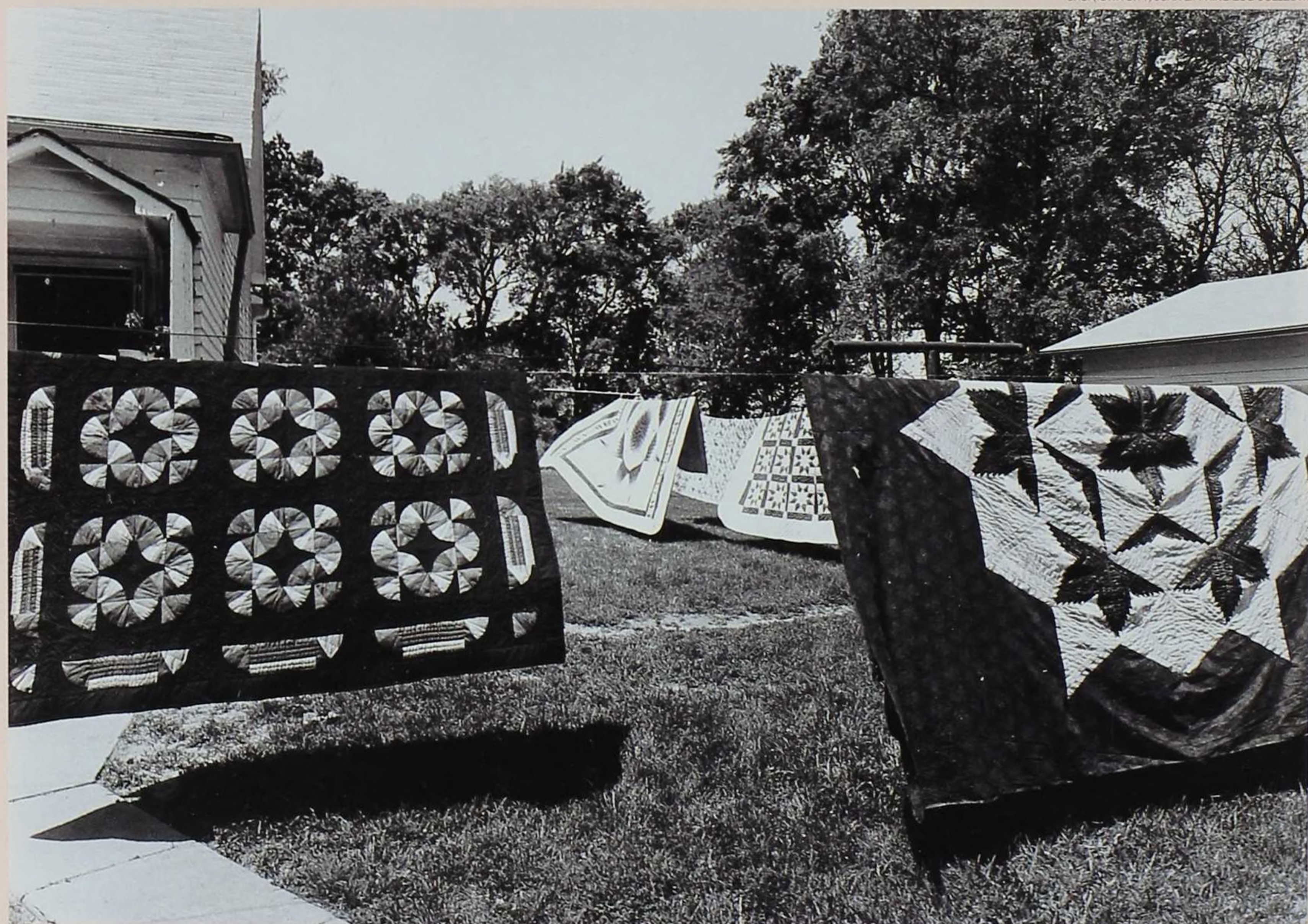
An unidentified member of the Shaw family of Greene County, Iowa, made this Sunshine and Shadow variation of the Log Cabin pattern, probably between 1880 and 1900.





Another variation of the Log Cabin pattern, this Windmill Blades quilt was also made by a member of the Shaw family of Greene County, Iowa, probably between 1880 and 1900. The quilter used the silk and silk velvets of the popular Crazy Quilt fad. The pattern is also called Pineapple, perhaps because the arrangement resembles a pineapple (a traditional symbol for hospitality).





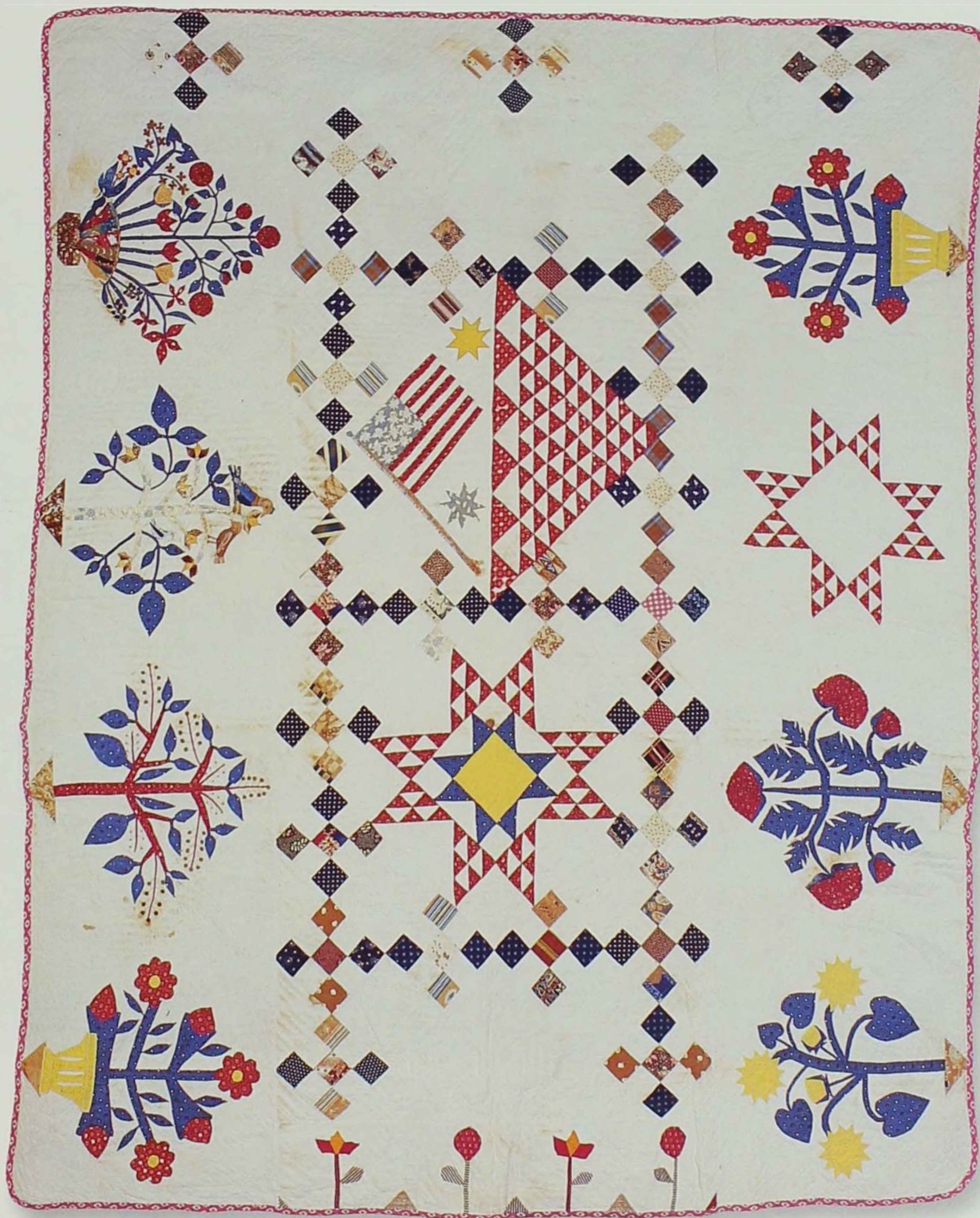
Quilts on clotheslines catch the wind  
at Sarah Miller's Kountry Kreations  
store near Kalona, Iowa.



# Appliqué Quilts

Appliqué is the technique of securing a piece of decorative fabric atop a fabric base. The technique is as old as piece-work. The earliest examples of conventional appliqué were cut out of floral chintz. Beginning in the second quarter of

the 19th century, patterns were constructed by seamstresses using plain cotton calicos. By the mid-19th century, the classic red and green appliqué was most popular.



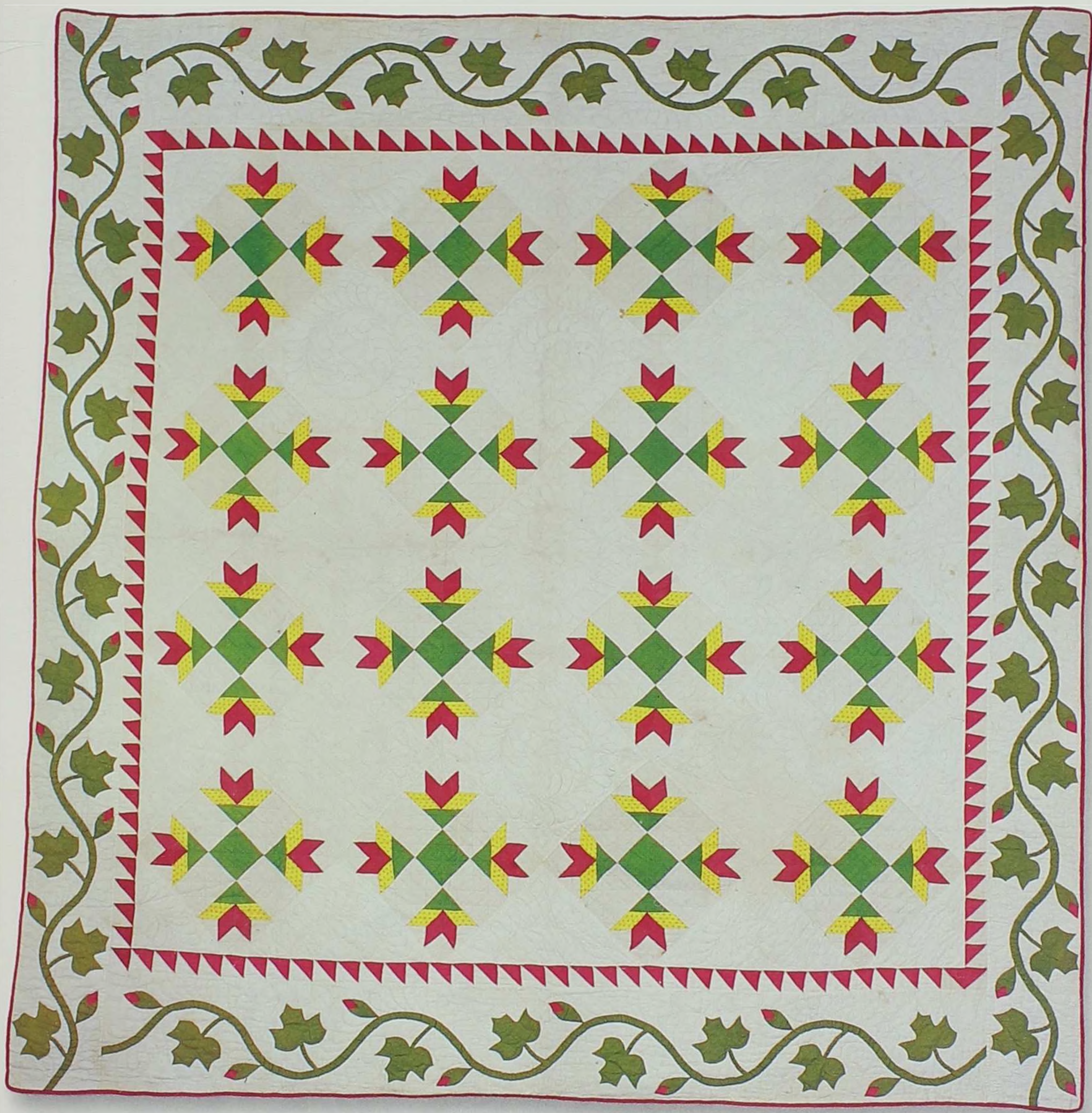
This Sampler appliqué and pieced quilt was made by Martha Horton White in Huntington County, Pennsylvania, in the 1840s. She migrated to Iowa in the 1850s. In 1908, her daughter-in-law, Amelia Grimes White, added the quilting.





Mary Jane Hughes, of Douglas, Illinois, made this Coxcomb appliqué quilt when she was 20, perhaps for her marriage to David Hughes. Although not visible here, her name and the date (1856) are stitched in the quilting. The Hugheses moved to Lenox, Iowa, in 1874. Mary Jane died in 1922.





Margaret Marshall Chapman made this Old Tulip appliqué quilt. According to family tradition, Chapman first spun the thread and wove the cloth in the 1840s in Randolph County, Indiana. The home-dyed cloth was originally made for family clothing, and later made into this quilt, between 1855 and 1860. Chapman died in 1896. Donated to the State Historical Society of Iowa in 1900, it was one of the Society's earliest quilt acquisitions.





Sara Elizabeth Vestal McNabb Spillman created this unique design in the classic red and green floral appliqué tradition. She was born in 1837 in Yadkin County, North Carolina, and moved with her family to Iowa in 1851. She married a widower, William McNabb, sometime before 1856. He died in 1858. Sara later married James Spillman and lived on a farm in Poweshiek County, where she made the quilt, probably between 1860 and 1880. She and James had eleven children. Sara passed her quilting skills on to her children. Her daughter made the quilts on pages 47 and 79.





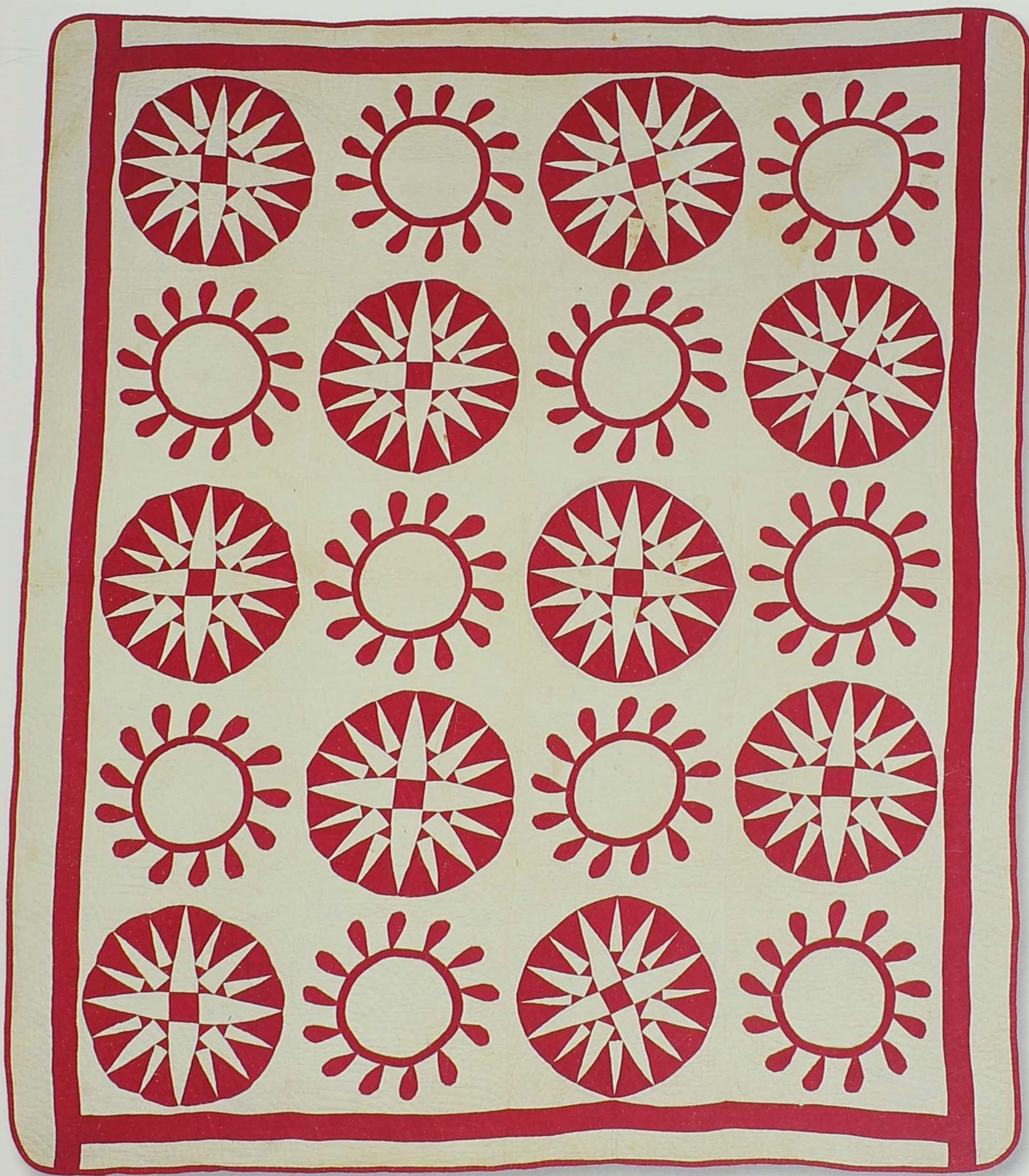
Lydia E. Henderson Shaw probably made this quilt between 1880 and 1900. The pattern was probably produced using a folded paper design. The striking red and white combination bears some resemblance to Hawaiian quilts. A prolific quilter (she also made the quilt on page 81), Lydia was the wife of prosperous farmer Lial M. Shaw, of Scranton, Iowa.





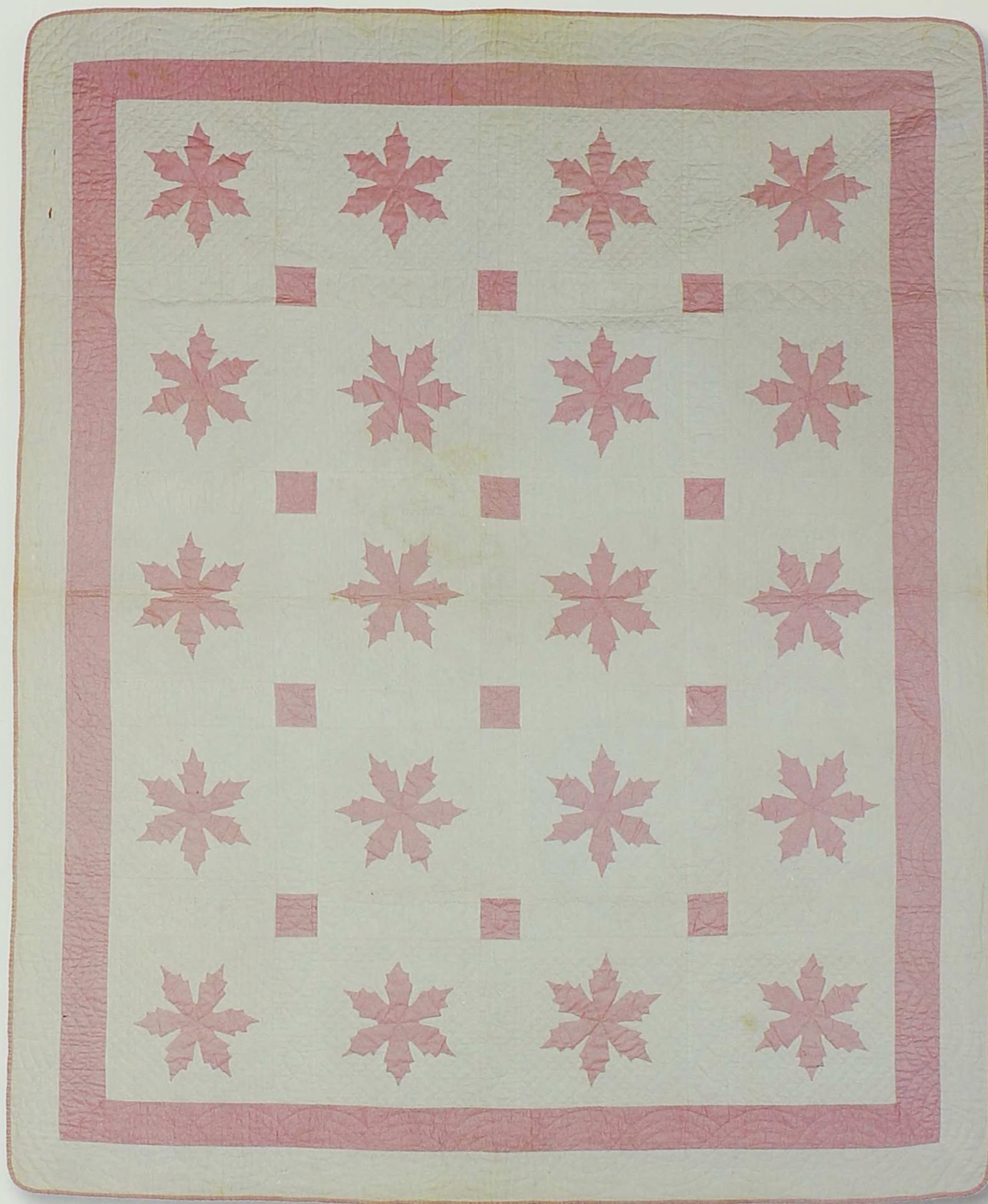
Catherine Grover Bates (1801-1889) made this quilt in Glidden, Iowa, in 1886. The pattern arose in the early 19th century and was popular well into the 20th century. The pattern has various names: "Mexican Feather" may have developed during the Mexican War; the name "Prince's Feather" or "Princess Feather" may have derived from the fact that feather plumes were often associated with the Prince of Wales, and that women often wore plumes when they were presented at court in England.





Mary Shum, of Page County, Iowa, made this Compass and Wreath appliqué quilt, probably between 1875 and 1900.





Janet McElroy, of Carlisle, Iowa, won first premium at the 1927 Iowa State Fair with this Oak Leaf appliqué quilt. She also made the whole-cloth quilt on page 85.





Flora Maria Spillman Rivers (1865-1944) made this Tulip appliqué quilt in Poweshiek County, Iowa. These particular shades of color are an indication that it was made in the 1930s. Rivers was the daughter of Sara Spillman (see page 74).





Members of a quilting and sewing circle from Lacona, Iowa, pose with corsages at Hattie and Benny Alter's home in the summer of 1903. (Back row, standing: Etta Newmann, Jennie McClenna, Hattie Alter, Leeta Rodgers. Middle row: Nell Hoffman, Effie Shupe, Lou Shupe, Anna Murray. Front row: Anna Clevenger, Grace Ralston, Myrtle McKnight.)



# Crazy Quilts

The Crazy Quilt fad of the 1880s and 1890s grew out of a combination of the Aesthetic Movement that swept America in the 1880s, and the late 19th-century craze for anything Japanese, which began with the American public's first glimpse of the Far East at the Centennial Exposition of 1876 in Philadelphia. By the mid-1880s, there

were stories of young women accosting young men for the silk in their cravats to use in Crazy Quilts. The fad reached such popularity that companies marketed ready-to-sew Crazy Quilt kits. Truly artistic Crazy Quilts have a definite order and method to the apparent madness of their design.



Lydia E. Henderson Shaw made this Crazy Quilt in 1884, perhaps as a remembrance of her wedding day and marriage in 1883 to Lial M. Shaw. The silk, silk velvet, and cotton quilt was probably displayed in the parlor on a couch rather than in a bedroom, so as to showcase the skills of its creator. Shaw was a prolific quilter; see also page 75.





As the center-panel dedication explains in German, this Crazy Patch quilt commemorates the retirement in 1890 of Pastor Paul Bieger of the Evangelical Lutheran Bethanian Church, in Burlington, Iowa, and was made by the church's Ladies Aid. The silk and silk velvet squares were designed separately and then connected by gold satin blocks embroidered with the names of the makers.





Clara E. Allen, of Sanborn, Iowa, created this silk, cotton, and wool Crazy Quilt sometime in 1899, when she was 22. She made the quilt as a tribute to her father's Civil War service and subsequent affiliation with the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR). The quilt includes both GAR ribbons and Republican Party campaign ribbons, and illustrates the close connection between the organizations.





These dark, heavy fabrics and their arrangement in a Crazy Patch pattern bear a resemblance to Amish and Mennonite quilts from Indiana. This could be a Mennonite quilt from Iowa. Although its exact date is unknown, it may have been made between 1890 and 1920.



# Whole-Cloth Quilts

Quilts with single-color tops and only the actual quilting stitches for decoration are called whole-cloth quilts. They are an ideal way of showcasing the quilter's needlework

skills. Whole-cloth quilts were especially popular in 18th-century New England. Many quilts from Iowa's Amana Colonies were made in the whole-cloth tradition.



Janet McElroy, of Carlisle, Iowa, made this whole-cloth cotton quilt in 1927. She used several quilting patterns. The general layout is the Framed Medallion, with wreaths, fleurs-de-lis, and rope borders on a diamond grid. (McElroy also made the quilt on page 78.)



SHSI (IOWA CITY)



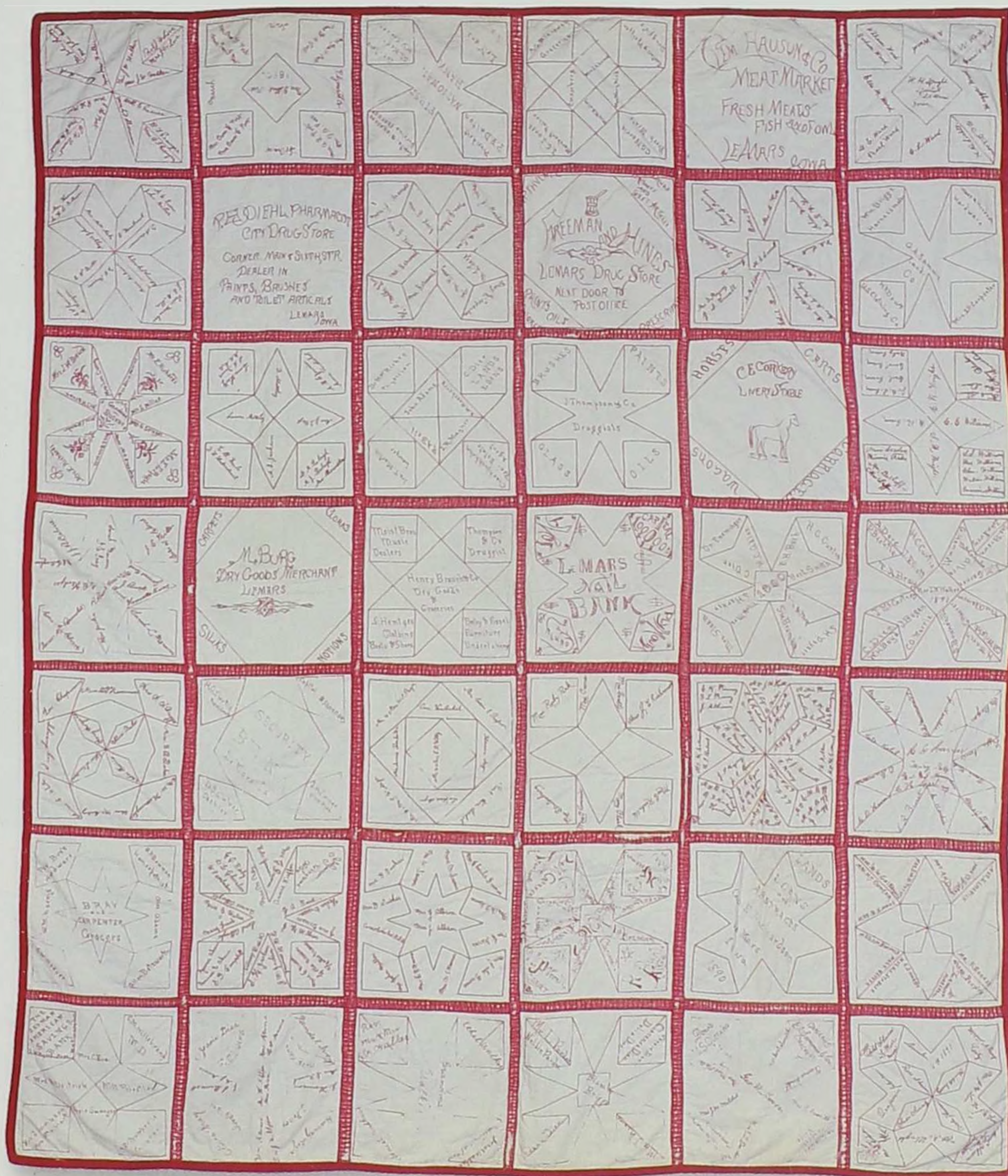
This autograph quilt bears the traditional white blocks in which women inscribed names, dates, or other messages to commemorate their personal relationships and sense of community. The quilt belonged to Ellen Strang, who settled with her family in Grundy County in 1853.



# Friendship Quilts

In the mid-19th century, some quilts took on a new function as women added inscriptions to their quilt blocks. Names, addresses, dates, statements of relationships, personal messages, and literary quotations were inked, stamped, or embroidered on the white fabrics incorporated

into the quilt blocks. Quilters called these “friendship” or “album” quilts. Women made friendship or album quilts to commemorate their communities—family, friends, school, and church—thereby transforming personal relationships into visible, tangible objects.



When the Reverend George W. Carr and his wife, Lucretia, left Le Mars, Iowa, for Sioux City, the Missionary Society presented them with this Friendship embroidered quilt. In its 42 squares are the names and businesses of some of the most prominent citizens of Le Mars; in a few squares, the year "1890" appears. Coming on the heels of the Crazy Quilt fad in the early 1880s, outline embroidery quilts were popular for friendship, fund raising, and commemorative quilts. This color combination, turkey red on white, was the most popular.



# Commemorative Quilts

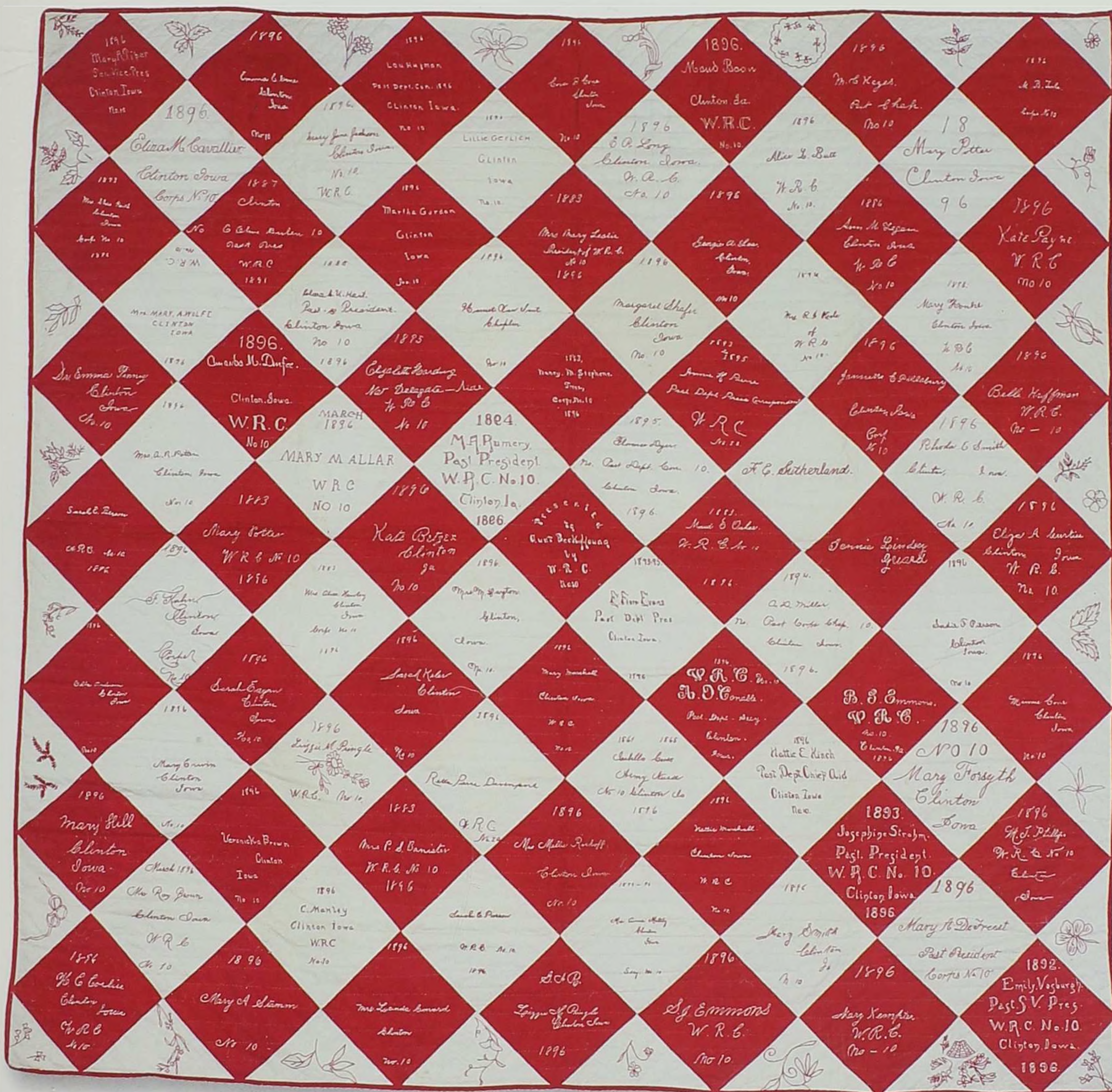
Commemorative quilts are made to commemorate an event or a person. They developed out of the Friendship quilt idea, and became quite popular after the Civil War to memorialize the sacrifices of soldiers. Women sometimes

incorporated political ribbons and silk badges into commemorative quilts. As statements of political beliefs, affinity groups, and community, such quilts were more likely to be displayed and carefully preserved, than used day to day.



A note that accompanied this commemorative Bow Tie pieced quilt tells its story: "One quilt made out of scraps of calico about the time of Civil War by Ladies Missionary and Aid of Howardsville Church, Floyd Co., Iowa, found in the home of Dr. J. W. Smith. The scraps were neatly rolled and had lain for 40 years in the attic of their stone mansion built in early 1870. The two hundred white patches are given patriotic meaning by having a soldier's name and regiment written upon each. The quilt is presented to the State Historical Department by Mrs. Nettie Hammer of Charles City, Iowa, August 29, 1912." Dr. Joel Washington Smith and his wife (Susan Maria Wheat Smith) came to Floyd County in 1857. Susan's brother's name appears on the quilt.





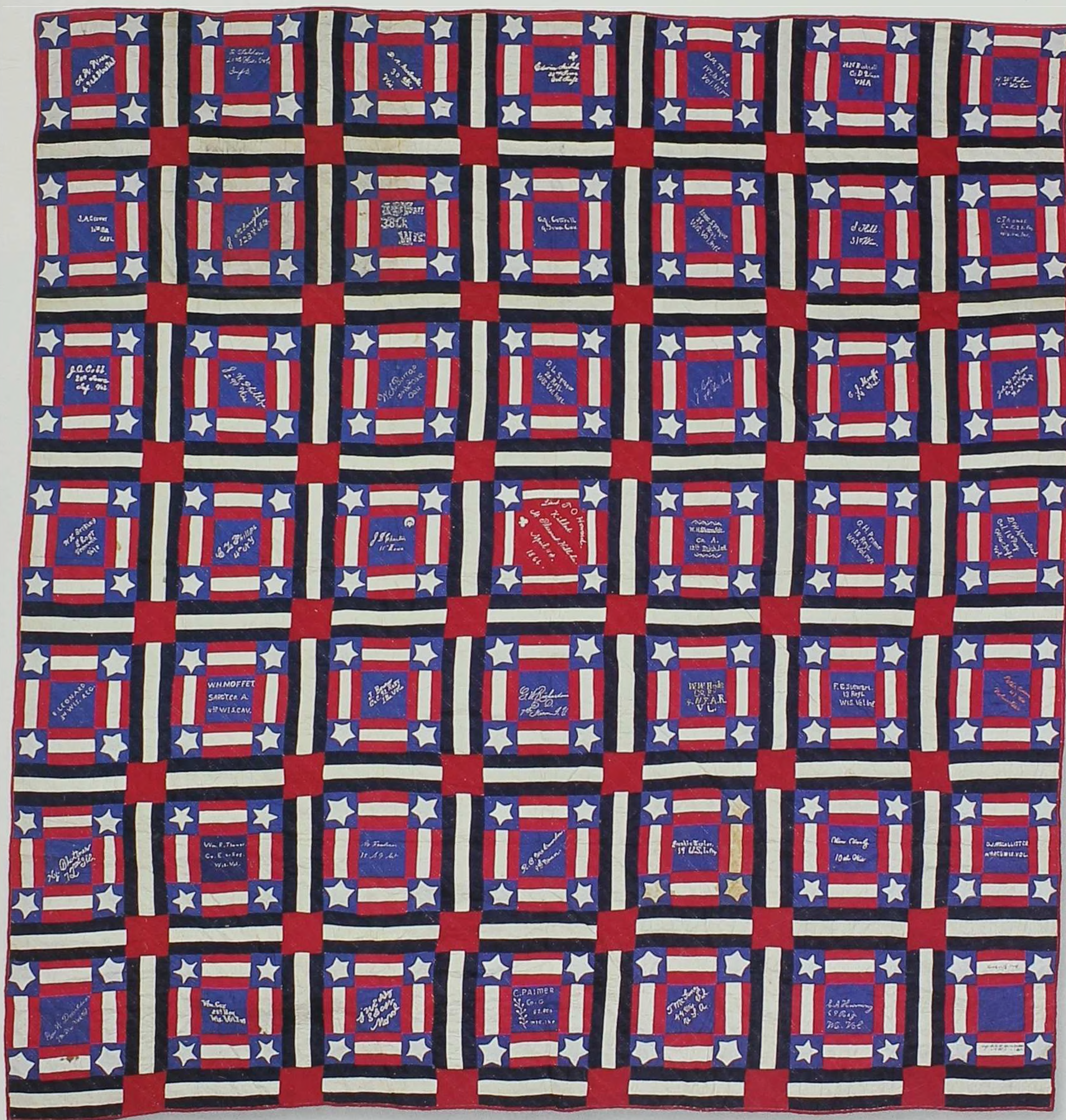
Clinton Corps #10, of the Women's Relief Corps (WRC), the women's auxiliary of the Grand Army of the Republic, presented this embroidered commemorative counterpane to "Aunt Becky" Young for her 65th birthday in 1896. "Aunt Becky" Young was actually Sarah A. Graham Young. She was born in New York in 1832 and enlisted as a nurse with the 104th New York Regiment during the Civil War. Because she was still a young woman, she declined the traditional nurse's title of "Mother." Instead, a doctor suggested that she be called "Aunt Becky." In 1868, she and her husband moved to Des Moines, Iowa, where she was quite active in the WRC, helping to establish two local posts and serving eight years as the Iowa Department chaplain. (Unlike quilts, counterpanes have only one layer, with embroidered and corded designs.)





“Aunt Becky” Young (see *previous page*) was also presented these silk and wool Crazy Patch squares in 1895 or 1896. They were made by Iowa units of the Women’s Relief Corps (WRC), the women’s auxiliary of the Grand Army of the Republic. Young was in the process of putting this quilt together when she died, in 1908. Her daughter inherited the quilt and donated it to the “Aunt Becky Young” Tent of the Daughters of the Union Veterans of the Civil War in 1916. The State Historical Society of Iowa acquired it in 1940.





The Thomas Howard Post of the Grand Army of the Republic (Company B, in Clear Lake, Iowa) made this memorial quilt to commemorate and honor the service and sacrifice of their namesake—Thomas O. Howard, a prominent Clear Lake farmer, who also served as secretary of the Cerro Gordo Agriculture Society in 1859. In 1861 Howard enlisted in the Union Army and was killed in action in 1864. The GAR post presented the quilt to his widow, Rose. It is not clear when the quilt was made or presented.





Auctioneer Eugene McNamara points to a bidder while Bob Burns holds up a quilt, in Truro, Iowa, December 1946.



# Fund Raising Quilts

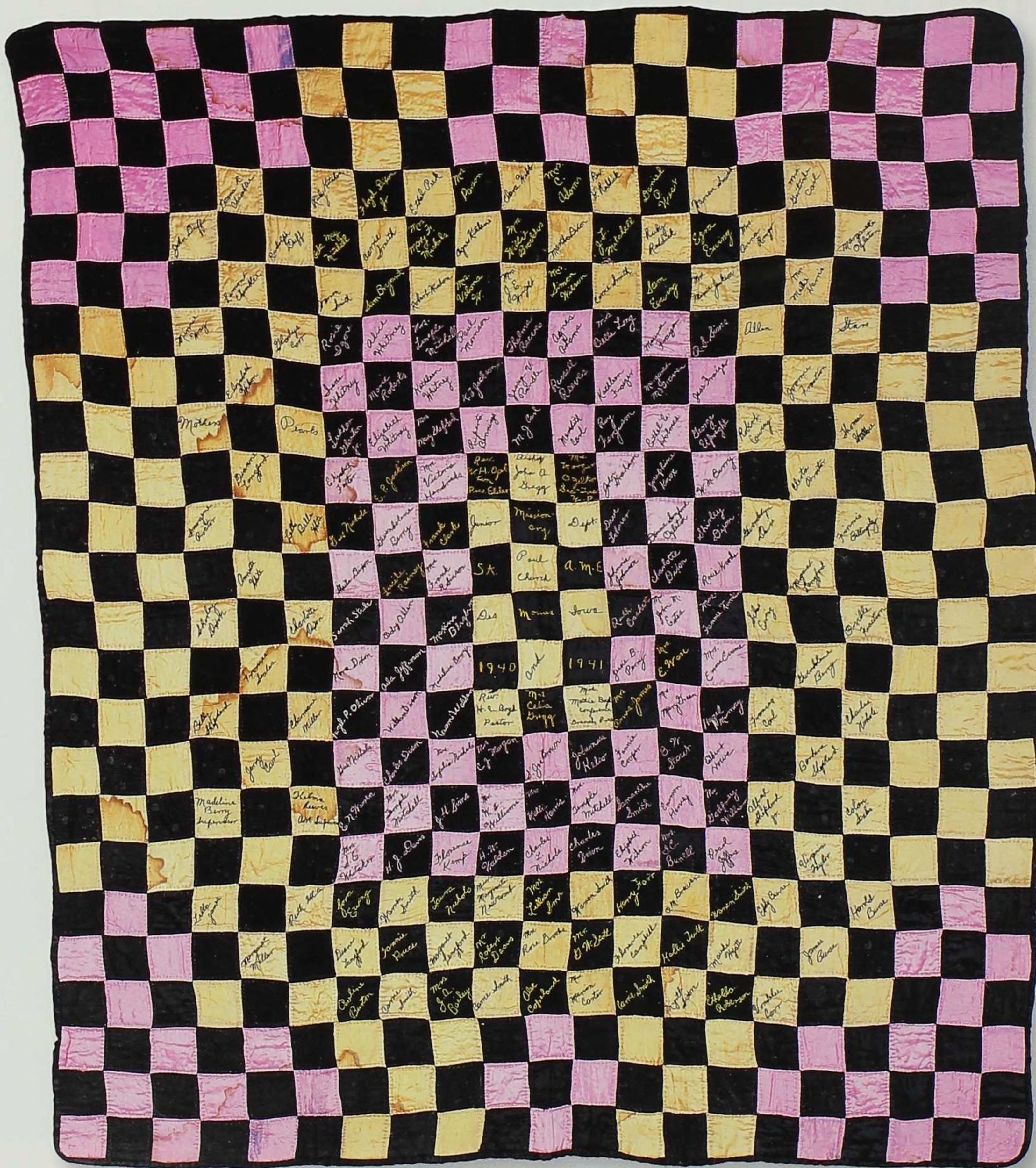
Fund raising quilts were first made in the late 19th century, generally by ladies aid societies in Protestant churches. Designs for fund raising quilts have been as diverse as the

groups making them. They often include not only the names of people who donated monetary contributions to a specific cause, but also the amount of their contributions.



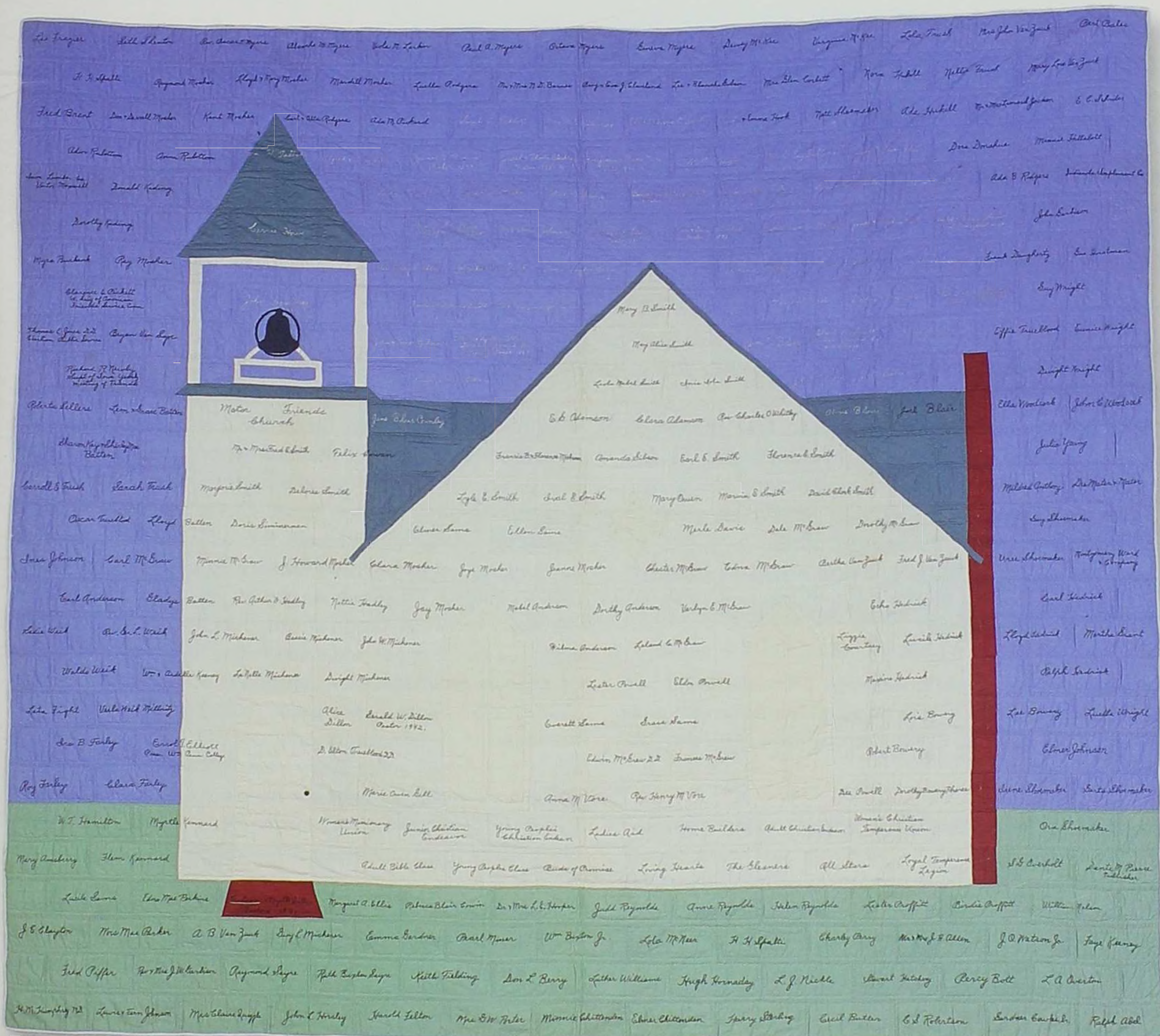
The "Ladies of Guthrie County" made this Red Cross quilt in 1917/18 to raise money during World War I. Contributors paid 25 cents to have their names stitched on it, and then the quilt was auctioned off. It raised more than \$1,600. A slightly different Red Cross quilt appeared in the women's magazine *Modern Priscilla* in 1917, with detailed instructions on how a quilt campaign could raise \$1,000. For that amount, the Red Cross could buy one ambulance, 129 beds, or 280 pounds of yarn to knit stockings.





Nora Madeline McKee Dixon (1870-1958) created this pleasing Block design for the St. Paul African Methodist Episcopal Church in Des Moines at the beginning of World War II. Her daughter, Madeline Dixon Berry, embroidered the handwriting in the blocks. The center squares contain the names of the bishop, pastor, and elders of the church. The surrounding names represent those who gave ten cents each to the Junior Missionaries to have their names on the quilt.





This quilt visually represents the facade of Motor Friends Church in rural Warren County, Iowa. The Motor Ladies Aid made the quilt during World War II to raise money for the construction of a church basement. Names of church members are in black embroidery on the church. Memorial gifts are noted in white thread on the blue sky, and the names of business leaders and friends are in black around the edges. The quilt raised \$492.25.



## Seeing quilts and coverlets up close

For a dazzling display and close-up look at the bedcoverings featured on the previous pages and more, visit the newest museum exhibit at the State Historical Society of Iowa—"Heartland Comfort." The exhibit is in the Iowa Historical Building, 600 East Locust, Des Moines, Iowa 50319. Phone 515-281-6412. Exhibits are open Tuesday-Saturday, 9-4:30,

and Sundays, 12-4:30. Closed on state holidays. (During June through August, the museum is also open Mondays, 9-4:30.) "Heartland Comfort" will close in May 2000.

The exhibit was curated by Michael O. Smith, designed by Jennie Morgan, and fabricated by Tom Hardie, Jon Robison, and Vern Tyler.

## Caring for quilts and coverlets

- ❖ Old quilts have a warmth and charm that cannot be found in many other antiques and accessory items. This has contributed to their present popularity as decorative pieces for the home. Consideration should be given to sharp edges over which the weight of the quilt may be draped. If the quilt is to be hung against a wall, a "sleeve" of fabric should be basted to the back of the quilt, through which a rod can be inserted.

- ❖ Remember that humid conditions promote mold and mildew growth and that extreme lack of humidity will cause the fibers of the fabric to dry out, becoming brittle and easily damaged.

- ❖ Even though quilts may look brilliant when drenched with light, exposure of fabrics to direct sunlight is one of the most common causes of damage to quilts. The invisible ultraviolet rays of sunlight are the most harmful. Never place quilts in direct sunlight; light exposure is cumulative and irreversible. Florescent lights also give off UV light.

- ❖ Store quilts properly. Strive for low light exposure and good air circulation. Unfinished wood and regular cardboard turn acidic with age and harm textile fibers that are in direct contact. Neither cedar chests nor blanket chests are good storage containers for quilts. Plastics give off harmful vapors and allow moisture to build up, which may lead to mildew. Excessive weight on folds in the quilt cause the fibers to break. Good alternatives are to wrap quilts in acid-free tissue paper and clean white sheets before placing on shelves or in acid-free cardboard boxes. Pad folds with crumpled acid-free tissue paper. Acid-free tissue is recommended for cotton quilts only, not silk or wool ones. Inspect and refold quilts every year, using a different folding pattern to avoid permanent creases. An excellent alternative is to layer quilts on an unused bed in a darkened room; place white sheets between them to prevent dye migration.

- ❖ Vacuuming should always be the first cleaning method. Accept some stains and imperfections as part of the quilt's history. Be cautious about dry cleaning or wet cleaning old quilts.

## Keeping their stories alive

Too often, the stories behind an object are lost when the object changes hands. Take the time now to record the following information about your quilts and coverlets.

- ❖ Quilt owner (name, address, and phone; relationship of quilt owner to quilt maker; how the quilt was obtained).

- ❖ Quilt maker (name, address, and phone; birth and death dates; occupation; religion; major residence for most of life; number and names of children; spouse's name and occupation; parents' names, places of birth, ethnicity or race).

- ❖ How did the quilt maker learn to make quilts and when? Why does/did the quilt maker quilt? Did the quilt maker

make other quilts? How many and when? Other information?

- ❖ Where and when was the quilt made? For what occasion, person, and use was the quilt made?

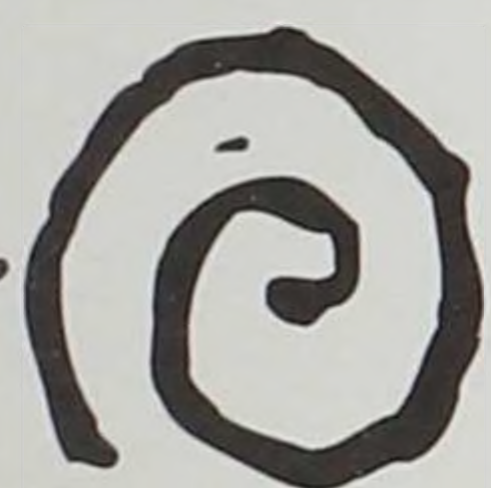
- ❖ Describe the quilt (pattern, size, color, fabric, name and source of the quilt pattern, etc.). Who did the quilting or tying? When? Other significant information?

- ❖ Once gathered, date and sign the information. Don't store it next to a quilt; paper and ink can damage fabrics.

*(The basis of the care and documentation guidelines above are materials created by the Iowa Quilt Research Project in 1989-1990.—The Editor)*



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# Iowa Heritage ILLUSTRATED



# One in a Million



SHSI (DES MOINES): PHOTOGRAPHED BY CHUCK GREINER

**A**mong the millions of items in the collections of the State Historical Society of Iowa is this afghan, crocheted by Robert Roberts in 1941 or 1942 for his girlfriend.

Born and raised in Sioux City, Iowa, Roberts (*see snapshot above*) was in the navy during World War II. He served on the USS *Hogan* (DMS-6), a mine sweeper assigned mostly to the Atlantic. First launched as a destroyer in 1919, the *Hogan* was reclassified and reprogrammed for World War II.

Using red, white, and blue yarn purchased in New York, Roberts crocheted the afghan while in the "gyro cage"—the ship's compass area, which housed the gyroscope. The afghan is about nine square feet.

—The Editor





Matthew Edel's blacksmith shop remains just as he left it when he died in 1940. Today one of Iowa's historic sites, the shop reveals the inventive and resourceful spirit of Edel, as well as the once-essential role of the local blacksmith. This issue introduces you to the village smithy of Haverhill, Iowa, more than half a century ago. Also in this issue—dozens of dazzling quilts, the adventures of a 1905 motorist, and an Iowa woman who stitches meaning and memory into her quilts.